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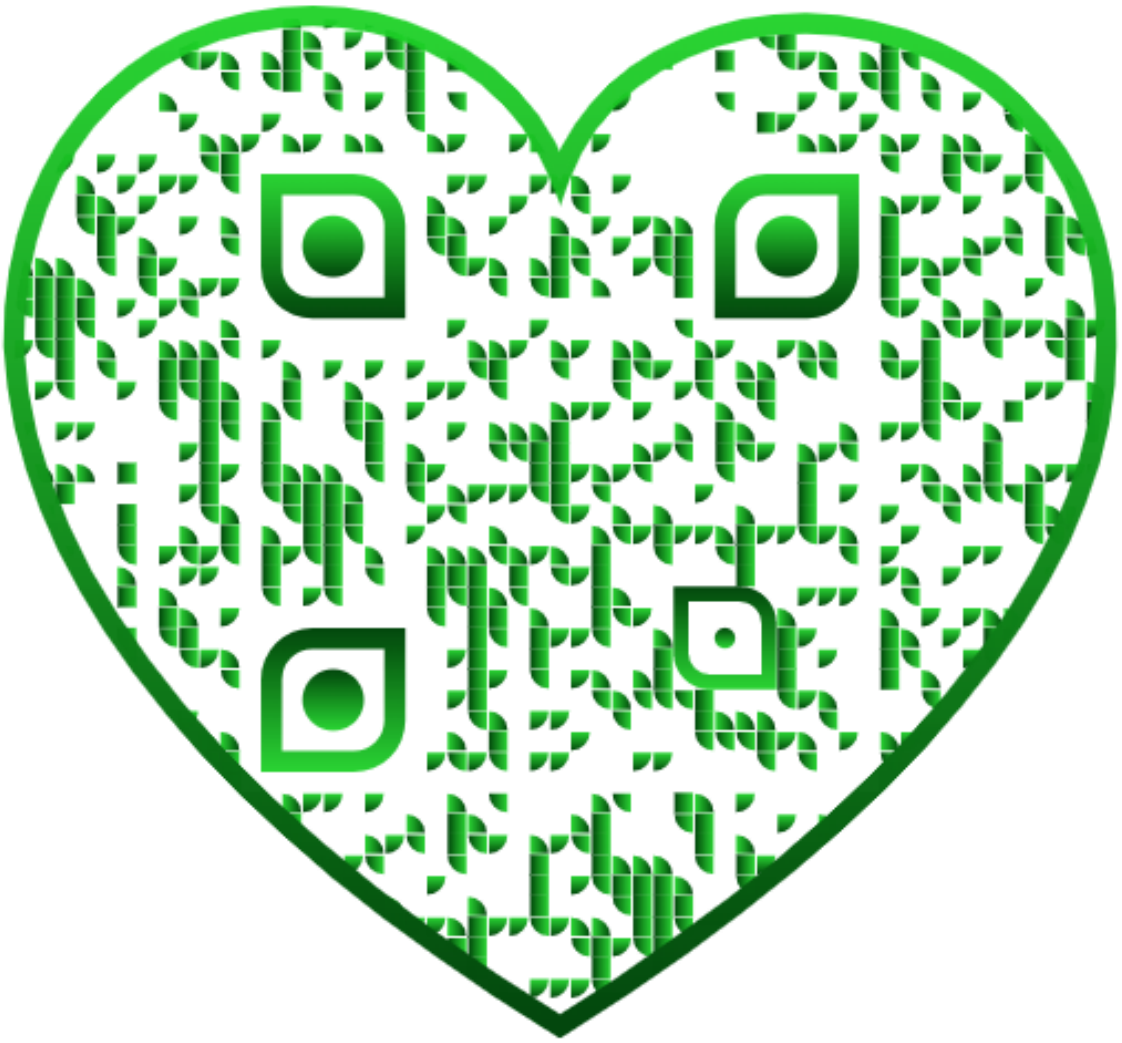

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Something new, something old...

Marshall's new Astoria amplifiers turned heads at Frankfurt Musikmesse in April, thanks in part to their striking retro cosmetics but also the prospect of something new and different from a great British brand. We've finally got our hands on the Astoria Classic – check out Huw Price's world-exclusive first review on page 46 for the *G&B* verdict.

Elsewhere in this issue, we speak to Black Keys mainman Dan Auerbach about his latest project, The Arcs. Both as a producer and musician, Auerbach has been responsible for some of my favourite records in recent years, and his penchant for pawnshop curios is conclusive proof that you don't need to spend a fortune on a boutique rig to create exciting, interesting and commercially successful guitar sounds.

Of course, the resurgence of instruments made by brands such as Harmony and Airline in recent years, thanks to the likes of Auerbach and Jack White, means that these guitars are less affordable than they used to be. Johnny Ramone found himself in a similar situation back in the late 70s; he started playing Mosrites because they were cheap, but the popularity of the Ramones ended up driving up the price, to the point where he could no longer afford to play them himself. There's probably a lesson in that somewhere! Perhaps there are still under-appreciated vintage bargains to be had among brands that are yet to experience a renaissance at the hands of a major artist... if there's a guitar in your collection that you think is an underrated gem, write in or head to **www.facebook.com/theguitarmagazine** and share your pictures with us. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the issue...

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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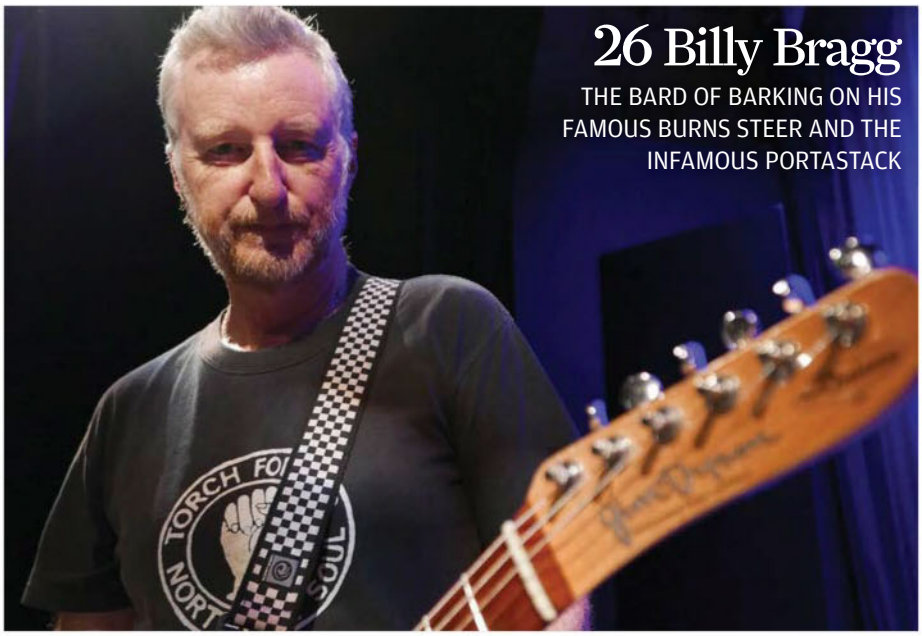
In a world-exclusive review, we run the rule over the British amp legend's new release



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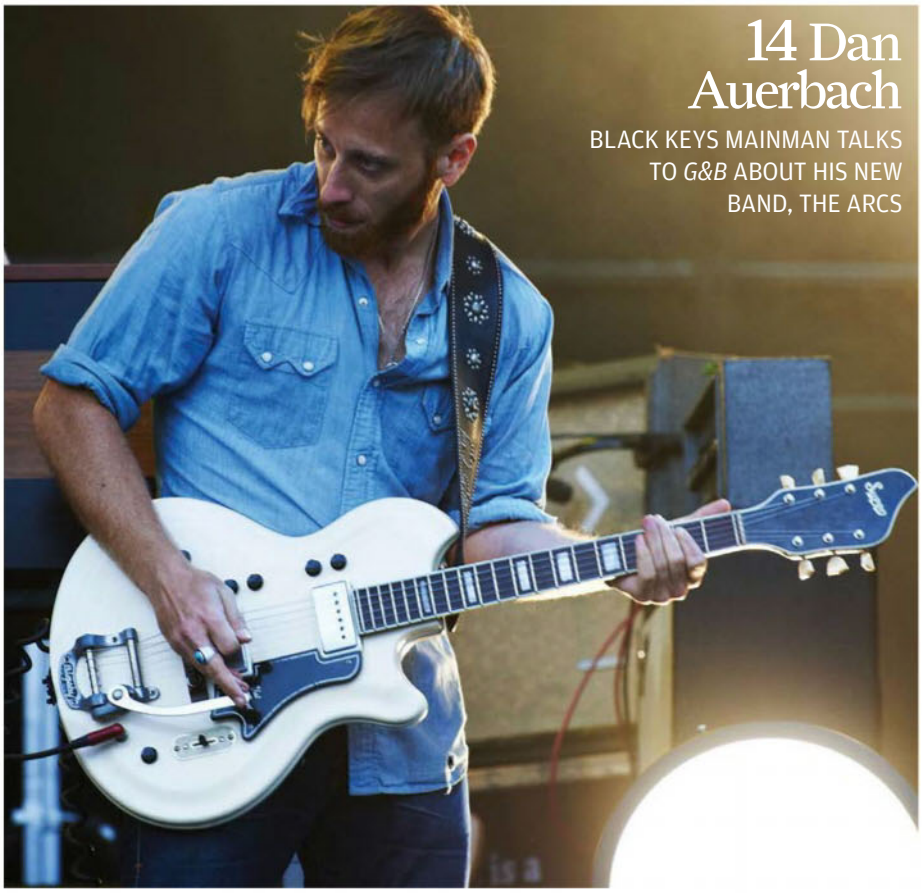

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Emerging talent on *G&B*'s radar and essential dates for your diary

ONES TO WATCH

Lanterns On The Lake

NORTH-EAST POST-ROCKERS WITH DIY ETHIC

A chance drunken encounter in a Newcastle pub ultimately led to the formation of Lanterns On The Lake in the mid-noughties. The fledgling band, then known as Greenspace, were seeking a singer and Hazel Wilde was in the right place at the right time.

Guitarist Paul Gregory takes up the tale: "Me and Ol [drummer Oliver Ketteringham] had formed an instrumental trio. We were in the pub and our bass player at the time was pretty drunk and shouted 'does anyone know any singers?' and a friend pointed at Hazel. She came to a rehearsal and we got on really well. Greenspace broke up and we carried on as Lanterns On The Lake."

Fast-forward a decade, and after three albums of immaculately composed, cinematic music on the Bella Union label, we've a lot to thank that boozy, since-departed bassist for.

Post-rock and shoegaze influences are abundant in the expansive auroral melancholy which made their 2013 sophomore album, *Until The Colours Run*, a cult treasure, and equally so on its darker, piano-led follow-up *Beings*, which is out on 13 November. It's a sound that lulls you into a sedative bliss, before catapulting you skywards with soaring leadlines and bowed guitars cloaked in reverb, which melt into a wash of cleverly arranged piano, strings and brass parts. It's evocative of Sigur Rós and an act Lanterns On The Lake have long admired – Explosions In The Sky, and has earned the band a show with the Royal Northern Sinfoni at the Sage in Gateshead next February.

Surprisingly, given the ambitious scale of the music that Lanterns On The Lake produce, their recording process is back-to-basics and DIY, with Gregory – a self-taught producer – at the controls.

"We record everything in our rehearsal room," he says. "It isn't a treated room, there's lots of sounds bouncing around, but that gives all our recordings quite an interesting feel. I learnt everything as I went, lots of reading, trying to remember what I'd seen other producers and engineers do and lots of YouTube videos and textbooks.

"*Until The Colours Run* was mostly recorded live into a laptop with Cubase 6. We all love a lot of reverb and like the music to have a lot of depth. We like to take a basic song and give it a lot of colour – a picture that surrounds the song. It's amazing what bands can do now without having to go into a studio – we've recorded in living rooms, shops, outside, in schools..."

The band head out on a short UK tour at the end of November, with a live sound that's built around a cherished Telecaster, an Eastwood Airline Coronado, a couple of Vox amps and a pair of faithful old delay and reverb pedals, while Hazel wrings some haunting piano sounds from a Nord keyboard.

"Hazel uses a Vox AC15 and I use a VOX AC30. My pedalboard hasn't changed very much since the first record," says Gregory. "I've got two pedals I've been meaning to replace forever – a DigiTech DigiDelay and a DigiVerb. I've used them for years and know them really well. You can buy them for about £40, but they just really seem to fit. I use a cello bow, with the DigiVerb turned up all the way, a Maxon OD9 and the DigiDelay, and it makes this massive sound.

"For bowed guitar, I use an Epiphone Les Paul, I have an Epiphone Dot that I've replaced all the pickups and electronics on, and my main guitar is an Eastwood Airline '59 Coronado. Hazel uses a Telecaster. Sometimes you get a Telecaster and it sounds like church bells and angels, and Hazel's is one of those – it really is the most amazing guitar."

Hear it for yourself when Lanterns On The Lake's UK tour starts at The Globe, Cardiff, on 29 November. The band also play the Sage, Gateshead on 6 February. For details, see **www.lanternsonthelake.com**

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Explosions In The Sky, Sigur Rós*

GEAR *Lanterns On The Lake*

- **GUITARS** Fender Classic Series 50s Telecaster, Eastwood Airline '59 Coronado, Epiphone Dot, Epiphone Les Paul
- **AMPS** Vox AC15, Vox AC30
- **EFFECTS** ZVEX Super Hard On, Fulltone 69 MK II, Dunlop volume pedal, Maxon OD9, EHX Micro POG, Line 6 DL-4, DigiTech DigiDelay, DigiTech DigiVerb, Pro Co RAT

IN THE DIARY

The Merseyside Guitar Show 2015

Promising to be the biggest incarnation of the event yet, The Merseyside Guitar Show returns to Aintree Racecourse Exhibition Centre in Liverpool, for its 13th consecutive year, on Sunday 22 November.

Spread over four floors and boasting more than 100 exhibitors, collectors and dealers, alongside national and independent stores and luthiers, Merseyside is one of the UK's biggest regional guitar shows.

In addition to providing the opportunity to try out new, second-hand and vintage guitars, amps and pedals, the show will feature a live stage, headlined by Connie Lush and Blues Shouter. Also on the bill are blues ace Steve Wright, 12-string virtuoso Paul Brett, acoustic folk duo The Huers and classic-rock covers band Dr Strangelove.

Admission to the show costs £6 and entry is free for accompanied under-12s.

For more details, visit the show's website at **www.guitarshows.co.uk**

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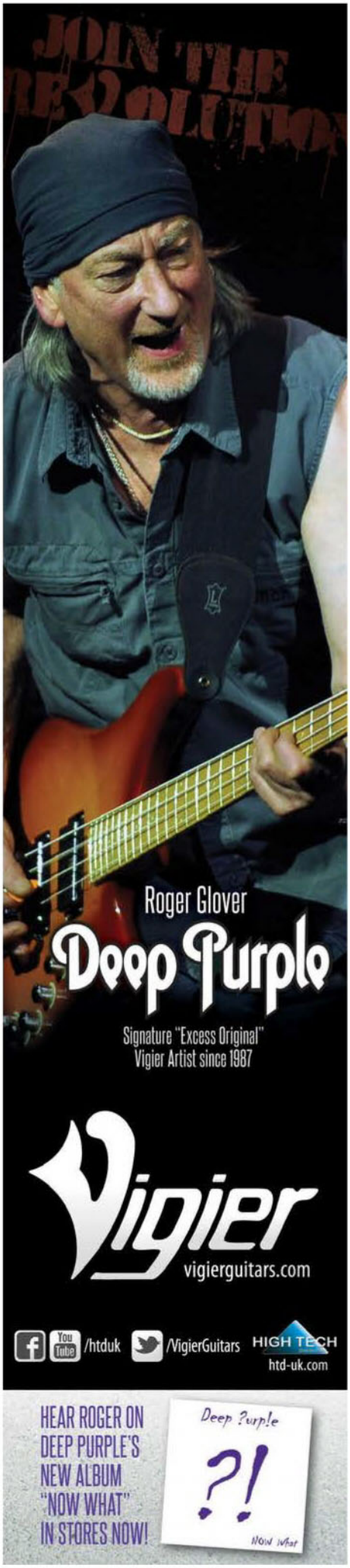
The Micro Dark offers a range of sophisticated tones, courtesy of a new, 12AX7-driven, high-gain preamp. You can dial in everything from classy cleans to brash distortion. The solid-state power section is capable of pumping out a tidy 20 watts and the amp can be connected to any 8-16 ohm speaker. The Micro Dark's other features include a transparent, buffered effects loop and headphone/line output with Orange's own CabSim circuitry.

To be in with a chance of winning this brilliant, adaptable micro amp head, visit **www.guitar-bass.net/comps/microdark** and answer the simple question...



Letters from America

After relocating to Arizona, Israeli luthier Gil Yaron set about a rethink of one of guitar history's most iconic designs. **DAVE HUNTER** inspects the Bolt S...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

A guitar maker of legend in the minds of many fans of vintage Les Pauls, Gil Yaron is perhaps best known as the Israeli luthier behind some of the world's most sublime reproduction '59 'bursts, although he has also built hugely respectable 50s bolt-neck recreations. While contemplating moving his business and family to the United States two years ago, Yaron figured it would behove him to design some original models. I had an opportunity to play the first of these, his Bone guitar – an elegantly original take on the set-neck, single-cut solidbody – and was massively impressed.

The Bone uses the archetypal wood combination of old-growth mahogany back and neck and carved eastern maple top, but Yaron routes the mahogany body to a shell that is filled with a precisely matched core lightweight paulownia before gluing down the top. The result is a genuinely solid-bodied guitar that nevertheless weighs a mere 6.1lbs. Add a hand-rubbed shellac finish, Brazilian rosewood fingerboard and Yaron's own patented Air Gap II humbuckers and the Bone is a tasty and highly expressive instrument.

Now, a few months after having settled into his new premises in Arizona, Yaron is submitting his second original design for consideration. A rethink of "the other great American electric guitar", the Bolt S is Yaron's take on the double-cutaway bolt-neck with vibrato bridge. Exquisitely crafted and creatively redrawn, it's an ergonomic rethink of the world's most emulated electric guitar, and another impressive achievement in the process.

Exquisitely crafted and redrawn, it's an ergonomic rethink of the world's most emulated electric guitar

As many followers of guitar forums will know, Gil Yaron has been generous about sharing his build process across the development of several guitars, and the prototyping of the Bolt S was no different. In a long thread in April 2014 (a search should still find it), Yaron laid bare his construction of the first example of this model, and the painstaking process reveals a blend of artisan and technician.

The results show a nuanced consideration of how a 25.5-inch scale bolt-neck should feel in the hand, sit on the lap, hang on the strap and resonate harmoniously – both unplugged and amped. And while the final product is flexible regarding pickup complements and some other details, it remains ultimately a homage to the spirit of the classic Strat.

This Bolt S has a lightweight swamp ash body carved in a shape that's mildly reminiscent of the Ernie Ball/Music Man Silhouette, although its lines and beveled edges follow original proportions in its asymmetrical double-cutaway design (you might also call it 'Strat meets SG'). The wood displays the kind of grain you'd expect in a cherished early-50s black-guard Tele, bold beneath a thin blonde finish in Yaron's proprietary blend of shellac and nitrocellulose lacquer. The neck is a superbly figured length of

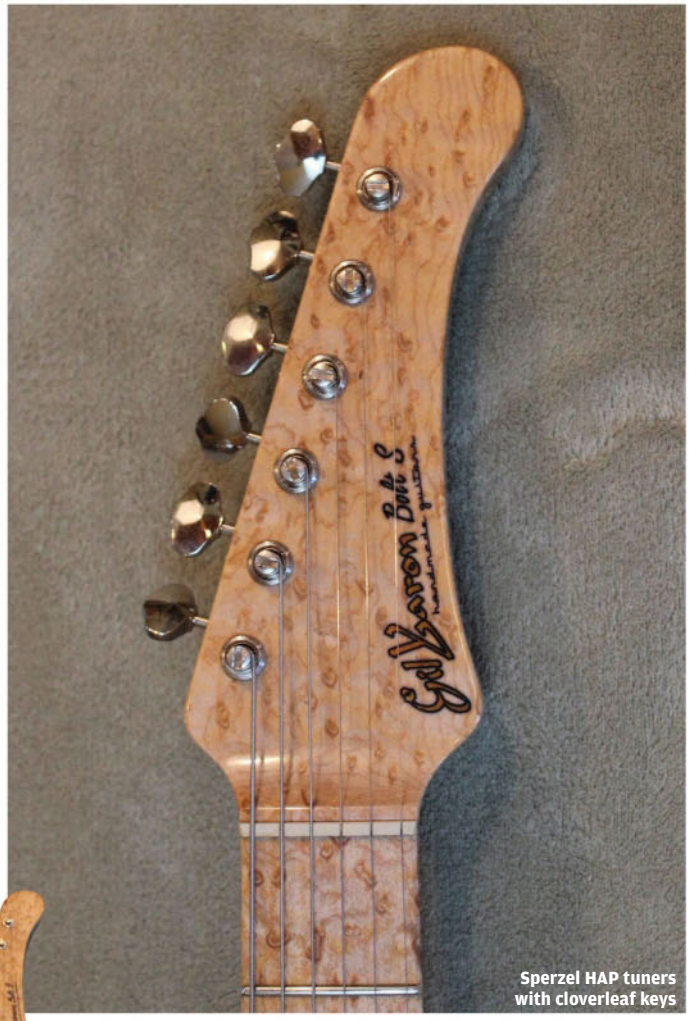
KEY FEATURES

Gil Yaron Bolt S

- **PRICE** Starting at $6,500 (approx. £4,271, plus shipping and any duties), plus any upgrades or special options
- **BODY** Swamp ash (other woods are available)
- **NECK** Bolt-on figured birdseye maple, full C profile
- **FINGERBOARD** Figured birdseye maple "cap", 9.5" radius (CITES certified Brazilian rosewood and other radii available)
- **FRETS** 22 medium nickel-silver
- **PICKUPS** Three Gil Yaron single-coil Air Gap II P-90s (other pickup configurations available)
- **ELECTRICS** Master volume, tone for neck pickup and for bridge and middle together, five-way switch
- **FINISH** A proprietary blend of shellac and nitrocellulose lacquer, in blonde
- **HARDWARE** Sperzel HAP tuners, Gotoh EV510T-BS vibrato with added brass saddles
- **STRINGS** Ernie Ball .010"-.046"
- **CASE** Gator moulded hardshell case, included
- **CONTACT** Gilyaronguitars.com, info@gilyaronguitars.com

Yaron winds the three Air Gap II P-90 pickups himself

The swamp ash body evokes the Ernie Ball/ Music Man Silhouette



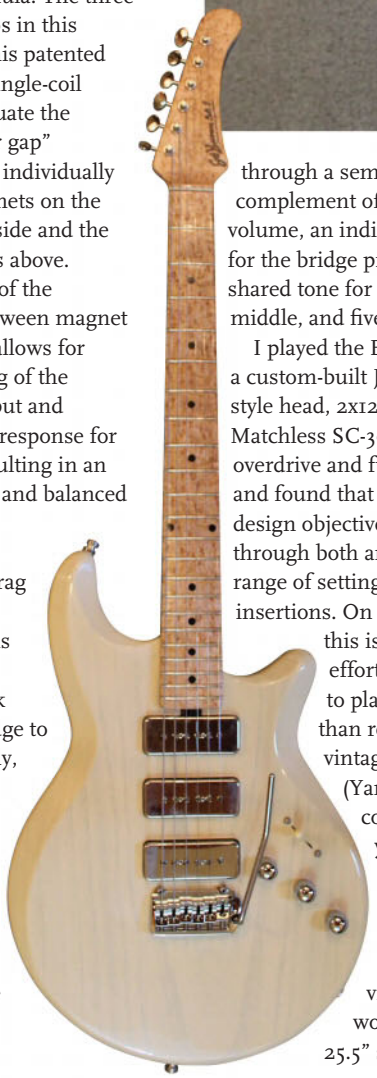
Sperzel HAP tuners with cloverleaf keys

birdseye maple, with a maple "cap" fingerboard that allows for the installation of Yaron's proprietary truss-rod design without the need for a skunk stripe at the back. Adjustment is achieved via a wheel within a slot at the body end, leaving more wood at the neck-to-headstock region for a stronger joint and improved resonance beneath the nut, while still achieving a neck that's easily tweaked without removing it – or a pickup – from the body.

The neck is available in different profiles by request, but I can't imagine many players taking issue with this one: a full, yet rounded C with a hint of soft V at its apex. With low shoulders that fall away gently, it sits beautifully in the hand and plays exquisitely all up and down the 22 well-dressed medium frets. The Gotoh EV510T-BS vibrato (to which Yaron adds brass saddles) is extremely smooth and return-to-pitch is excellent. Sperzel HAP (Height Adjustable Post) tuners with cloverleaf keys allow for optimum string break angles past the Graph Tech NuBone, eliminating any need for string trees.

Gil Yaron has long wound his own pickups – PAFs and P-90s for his LPs, Tele and Strat-style single coils for his bolt-necks – and the new creations for his original guitars are an enormous part of the formula. The three Air Gap II P-90s in this Bolt S employ his patented technology in single-coil designs that situate the eponymous "air gap" between the six individually adjustable magnets on the pickup's underside and the steel pole pieces above.

Adjustment of the relationship between magnet and pole piece allows for precision tuning of the pickup's output and treble and bass response for each string, resulting in an incredibly clear and balanced amplified tone, without placing any magnetic drag on the strings themselves. This set reads 8.83k, 8.06k and 7.01k ohms from bridge to neck respectively, which would indicate a good, balanced trio for standard P-90s – although these pickups are nothing like standard P-90s. They are wired through a semi-traditional complement of master volume, an individual tone for the bridge pickup, with a shared tone for the neck and middle, and five-way switch.



I played the Bolt S through a custom-built JTM45-style head, 2x12 cab and a Matchless SC-30 combo with overdrive and fuzz pedals, and found that Yaron's design objectives rang true through both amps at a range of settings and pedal insertions. On top of which, this is a superbly effortless guitar to play. Rather than repackaging vintage S-style tones (Yaron's had those covered for years), the Bolt S reinterprets the essential ingredients – three pickups, vibrato, trad woods and 25.5" scale length – into a modern instrument with a more open voice. These pickups look like P-90s, but they sound very little like them, other than attaining just a whiff of gritty-edged hair at the front of the attack. Instead, they are extremely clear and articulate, yet full sounding, and surprisingly quiet for wide-coiled single coils (plus, the in-between positions are noise cancelling).

The Bolt S sounds snappy, funky and round at clean amp settings, excelling at the poppier side of country or, with just a little more amp gain, stinging retro Chicago blues. With either amp cranked into crunch or, for example, a Gas FX Drive Thru overdrive, these pickups' clarity via the swamp ash and maple's punchy and slightly scooped voice lends bite and power to lead tones, and an extremely crisp snarl to powerchords. This is a beautifully constructed bolt-neck that touches several Strat-inspired references, but more fully lends its own voice and character to your playing.

Marshall

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MUSIC IS OUR PASSION

THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"The guys are some of my best friends, we've kind of been making Arcs music for years; it just never had a name"

When Black Keys mainman Dan Auerbach created his new musical project, he wound up playing "a lot of bass", blending Mariachi with psychedelia and producing an unofficial East LA hit he has dubbed "kind of low rider music"

Story **Michael Heatley**

Have you heard the story about the teenager who traded the Strat his mum bought him for a dodgy Far Eastern guitar with four pickups? The individual in question is Dan Auerbach, main man of the Black Keys – and he's still using his Teisco today.

This is a man who knows his mind. And his decision to step off the rock 'n' roll roundabout that's seen him and Black Keys partner Pat Carney rocket to worldwide stardom in the past decade is one he's certain is right for him at this moment. So much so that he's unwilling to discuss his main band's future directly. But more of that later...

Far from being a one-record wonder, new project The Arcs is destined to have a life of its own, with winter dates in the US and Europe already announced. Like a modern-day Ry Cooder, Auerbach blends Mexican Mariachi, rock, psychedelia and Al Green-esque soul to produce a mix all of his own.

"This has been going on for so long," he drawls. "The guys in the band are some of my best friends and some of the people I've made music with in the past, so we've kind of been making Arcs music for years; it just never had a name. So yes, this will definitely continue."

Advent of The Arcs

The Arcs played their first show in East LA in early August. The line-up consists of Auerbach, Leon Michels, Richard Swift, Homer Steinweiss and Nick Movshon. Swift was the last live bass player with the Black Keys, while Movshon carried out that role in 2010, with Michels employed on the same tour to add keyboards and percussion.

Also involved is a Mariachi trio, Mariachi Flor de Toloache, a studio booking having resulted in a permanent liaison. "Leon and I were writing a song (*Pistol Made Of Bones*) and we thought it would be cool to have a Mariachi instrumentation section," says Auerbach. "So we hired a band and they turned out to be all girls, which was an interesting dynamic. I don't write music, so I sang it to them; they picked it up by ear, wrote their part and it sounded beautiful.

"So we put them on another song, then another, and they kept doing it. Then we said, 'Hey, can you guys sing?' and the rest is history. They were what Leon and I had been looking for for years. So they get lead vocal parts on some songs."

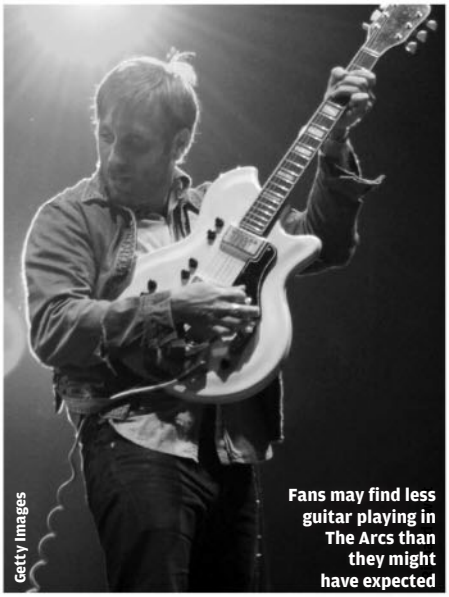
All material is credited to the group. "I am part of a larger team, and it's pretty satisfying," confirms Dan, revealing that, while the music is very different to his usual, his approach as a guitar player remains unaltered. "Nothing changes. I still just do what's best for the song, not just what >

Nick Walker

Getty Images

Alysse Gafkjen

"I have never stopped using the Tele, it's always been my first love"



Getty Images

Fans may find less guitar playing in The Arcs than they might have expected

I am personally interested in. No matter how simple or minuscule, if that's what needs to be done that's what I do."

But Black Keys fans should be prepared to settle for less guitar. When asked which tracks were of particular interest to six-stringers, Dan deadpans: "The real lesson for a guitar player is to listen when I am not playing the guitar – that's when they should focus the most."

The songs were "created together for the most part. Maybe I had one or two skeletons, but pretty much everything was created in the studio." Recording was done in piecemeal fashion: "Days were set up by having a couple of people available. We didn't set up a two-week session. It was just 'Are you free this weekend? Let's do something'. So we ended up recording all over the place with different gear and it still sounds pretty cohesive; it's about having the same people."

These informal sessions took place across the US, in Los Angeles, Nashville and in a lounge room at the legendary Electric Lady Studios in New York, where Jimi Hendrix latterly recorded. One unexpected by-product for Auerbach was a venture into the four-string realm. "I played a lot of bass on the record, I feel like I have turned a corner on bass in recent years, started to figure it out more. I use a short-scale Fender 60s Mustang bass through an old Triad."

Tele tales

Auerbach is a Grammy-winning producer after an award for 2011's *El Camino* (he has also produced Dr John and Hacienda, among others). "Everybody better listen!" he crows self-mockingly, before revealing that working with other acts has given him a broader palette on the production front. "I've been growing and changing ever since I started. Every experience I have in the studio affects me and changes me."

"I am just living in the moment"

Richard Swift

Auerbach's approach to guitar remains unaltered

Richard Swift

FAMILY MATTERS

Dan Auerbach's middle name is Quine – and, as well as Telecaster-toting Uncle Tim, he had another guitarist to look up to in the family, in second cousin (once removed) Robert.

Robert, like Dan, hailed from Akron, Ohio, but made his name in New York as lead guitarist in punk pioneer Richard Hell's Voidoids. He was then recruited by Lou Reed, with whom he made some notable recordings, including 1982's *The Blue Mask*, and also sessioned for acts as diverse as Marianne Faithfull, Lloyd Cole and Brian Eno. He sadly ended his own life in 2004 after the death of his wife, but not before passing on some of his knowledge to his young, enthusiastic relation.

"I had family meals at his mum's house when I was 19, 20," Dan recalls, "and my parents asked him to spend time with me. He thought I was going to want to learn Limp Bizkit songs, and I turned up with my Teisco! He was excited by Junior Kimbrough (a bluesman Dan idolised in early life); he loved it and got very excited, but he died before I got to look him up in New York. He would have loved all this [The Arcs]."

Only two guitars were used in this project, his fabled leather-pickguard Telecaster from early Black Keys days and the previously mentioned greenburst Teisco. "I have never stopped using the Tele, it's always been my first love," says Auerbach. "My Uncle Tim played in a blues band around Ohio; he had a tobacco burst Tele with binding, which looked super-cool, and he had the best tone using an early pre-CBS Super Reverb.

"Tim has a day job and works in an office, but he was a big influence on me; that guitar and amp always cut through whatever was around it. When I first started the Black Keys I had my uncle's setup, a tobacco burst Telecaster and a Super Reverb, because it sounded awesome."

As for his beloved Teisco, he credits this and his subsequent love for vintage, off-brand guitars to a man called Clive who "ran a fantastic guitar shop just west of Cleveland. He was one of those who, 20 years ago, had displays of Teiscos before that was hip. I was a big fan of Hound Dog Taylor and he played a Teisco Del Rey with four pickups through a Super Reverb. I had a video of him, which I sent away for and studied... so when I hit the road, I have a Teisco and a Tele."

> "I still just do what's best for the song, not just what I am personally interested in"

The Arcs took their stage bow at a small arts gallery in East LA. "We just did about half an hour with six songs. We played *Manflower*, which really killed, and *Pistol Made Of Bones* was great with the Mariachi girls. *Stay In My Corner* has become an unofficial East LA hit, kind of low rider music."

Mariachi bass is supplied by a Columbian woman on a guitarrón. "We recorded them on a couple of microphones and couldn't really hear the bass, so we said we'd record the bass later and bring it up in the mix," Auerbach explains. "It made the coolest sound, the weirdest bassline because of the way that instrument is strung. So she ended up playing bass on three songs. We wiped out my and Nick's bass – on *Cold Companion*, it's all guitarrón bass."

Name game

While Auerbach didn't play any bass as The Arcs went live, there was plenty going on. "I stuck to guitar, Nick is going to be covering all the bass. Richard and Homer are switching; Homer is getting up and playing fuzz bass and Rich is playing percussion and keyboards. The girls all play instruments, too – a tiny five-string guitar, violin and trumpet. Put 'em together and it sounds like the band from *Star Wars*!"

The new outfit's name came from a track on the album and was a last-minute choice. "That song was called *The Arc* first, and when we were thinking of the band name we >

Dan Auerbach onstage with his '65 Supro Martinique

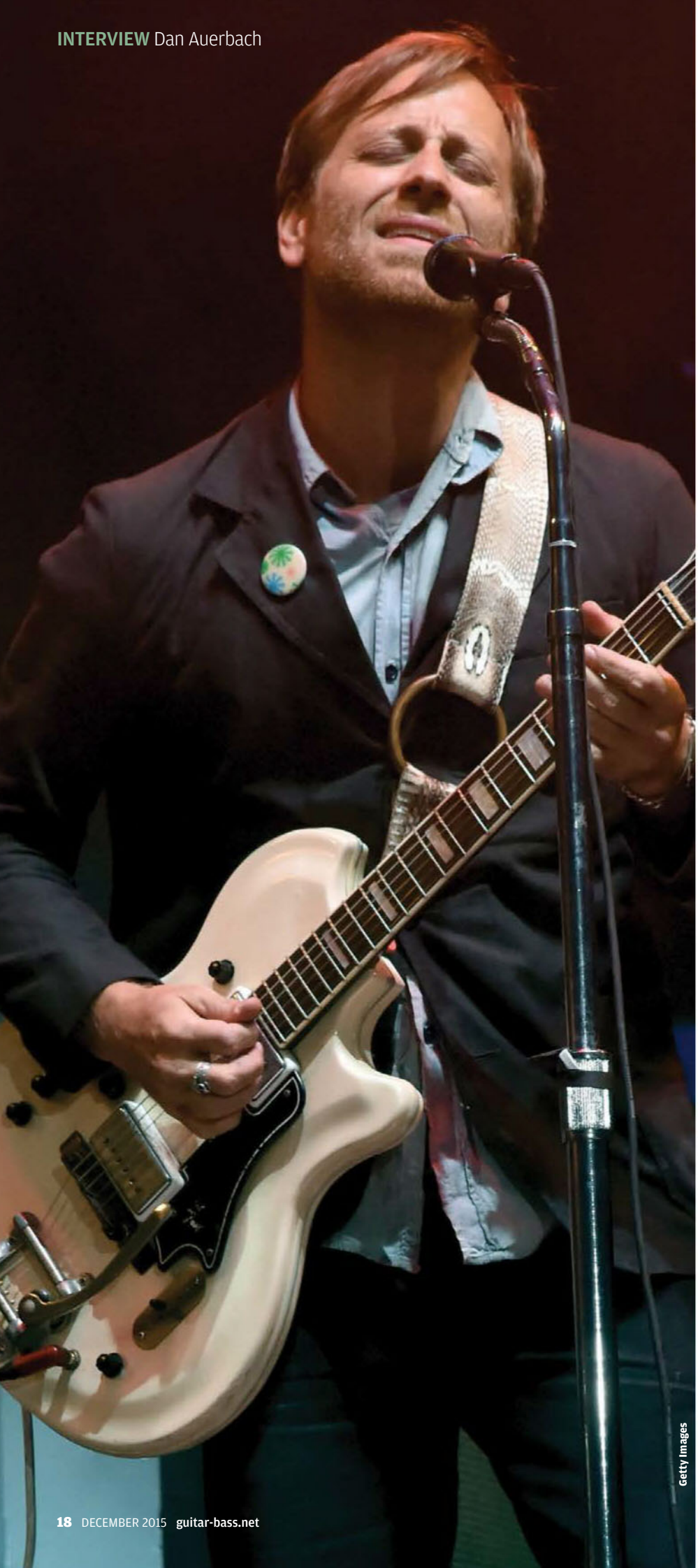
Getty Images

AUERBACH AND AMPS

Dan's amplification rig on the last Black Keys tour was "a 45-watt Marshall, a Fender Quad Reverb and two small Danelectros – one's a suitcase amp like the one Little Walter played harmonica through – with eight-inch speakers. They're just there to look cool. All give me much the same quality; I set the amps at that sweet spot, then run them all together."

He faces the amps away from him, a trick he learned from late, great American-Indian guitar legend Link Wray of *Rumble* fame. "He had the amps turned away from the audience, because if they faced the audience it would have blasted everyone's ears. I tried it, and it sounded so much better."

His board is "a switching pedalboard. We're always fixing pedals as the boxes get smashed, so this little relay switches instead and the pedals sit in a rack." The Arcs show saw him use "completely different gear – two (Fender) Deluxe Reverbs and a Tele. This one is original with single coils... the one I play with the Black Keys has humbuckers; a very different thing."



Getty Images

thought we could be called The Arcs and have a song, *The Arc*... it came out favourite."

In 2010, Auerbach cut a solo album, *Keep It Hid*, during a period of tension between Carney and himself, that turned out to be a temporary step off the rock 'n' roll roundabout. Ask Auerbach if this is another brief diversion or his future, and he becomes slightly defensive. "I wouldn't be able to answer that definitively; I am just living in the moment," he says. The Keys' UK tour was curtailed after Carney got injured, but while his percussionist partner is now fit and well, it seems unlikely cancelled dates, maybe any dates, will be (re)scheduled. "Asking me what my plans are for the future is weird. We were touring non-stop for four years..."

Unique collaboration

The Grammy-winning producer is similarly cagey when asked if there's anyone he would like to work with in the future. "I do have a few people, but I can't say – they're already lined up." Dan worked with Ike Turner before he died in 2007, and reveals unheard music exists from this fascinating match-up. "We did a couple of songs. Brian Burton (Danger Mouse) hooked us together, asking us to write the music and have Ike singing. They have stayed in the can; I heard one the other day and his voice was like Screamin' Jay Hawkins times 20... quite extraordinary."

So will Auerbach's extraordinary Arcs reach a wider audience than the Black Keys? Dan admits he has "no clue. You hope that people will like it, but you never know what is going to happen. Nothing is guaranteed in this business; we didn't make this music with any particular audience in mind."

Open your mind to The Arcs... you might just be surprised!

LISTEN UP

BLACK KEYS
Turn Blue
Eighth, most recent (2013) and, who knows, maybe final album from the Ohio blues-rock duo. Most of the album was recorded at Sunset Sound in Hollywood.

BLAKROC
Blakroc
The Black Keys' 2009 collaboration with hip-hop and R&B acts, including Mos Def and Ludacris, was hailed as an innovative rap/rock fusion.

THE ARCS
Yours, Dreamily
Dan's new project, described by one critic as "a downtempo treat, tailor-made for sundazed summer evening drives with the windows down."

AND ANOTHER THING... Dan's Black Keys guitars range from a brace of Ibanez Gibson copies through a semi-hollow Harmony H78 to a 1964 Guild Thunderbird. Not to mention his Tele and Teisco...

THIS IS THE SOUND

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READER BOARDS

TOM FOURCADE plays lead guitar in a four-piece covers band, so he needs a robust and reliable board and prefers to keep it simple...

KIT LIST

TOM FOURCADE

- **PEDALS (IN ORDER)** Bigfoot Engineering King Fuzz, Fulltone Clyde Standard Wah, Xotic EP Booster, Jam Waterfall, TC Electronic Flashback, TC Electronic PolyTune Mini
- **PATCH CABLES** A cobbled-together mixture, which can be infuriating when I reorganise the order or swap pedals out! I would love to go for a high-quality solderless set I can cut to length, but don't seem to find the time to change and the current way is easy to manage
- **POWER SUPPLY** SoundLab Pedal Power 450 with six isolated nine-volt outputs
- **BOARD TYPE** Stagg 13.5x22-inch aluminium tray, one-inch deep with a felt base

What inspired this setup?
"I play lead and rhythm guitar across a variety of styles, so I need a setup capable of providing a variety of distinctive tones while not compromising on quality. I am a total gear fiend, so I prefer high-quality individual pedals that I can mix and match to suit different songs and as my tastes evolve. This setup takes me from warm soulful cleans to heavy rock and points in between."

Tell us a little about the journey...
"I like a loud, clear, slightly overdriven EL84/British-type base sound, from which I can produce a variety of tones using single coils or humbuckers. I detest tone suck, and rely on true bypass and a buffer (in the wah) to maintain signal integrity. I find isolated power supplies also help to avoid signal degradation. The SoundLab PSU works great. I keep a battery in the EP Booster, as I can survive on that alone if the PSU goes down. I've been through many boosts/drives looking for 'the one' and realised I actually need two or three! I have learnt to use boost/drive to get different tones according to the song. The EP is very useful for adding weight, but when I want a more dynamic distortion the fuzz comes in, enabling me to go from cleanish through chewy to savage, musical feedback. I like a brighter dynamic sound rather than darker and mushy like some Fuzz Faces/Big Muffs. I also want it not to kill other pedals. King Fuzz does this nicely. After my 80s Cry Baby died, I selected the Clyde Standard, it's very musical and sweet. The Flashback is a revelation, with a classy dynamic sound that blends with amp reverb and other pedals. Why did I sell the CE-2 in '89?! I've been through many chorus/Uni-Vibes and recently retired a Mini Deja Vibe for a Jam Waterfall; perfect for 80s stuff – warm and sweet."

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?
"I've played with octave, but never found one I like. I also thought of an Eventide ModFactor or Strymon equivalent; but I know I need it simple. I'm hoping someone will provide a dual-stomp Uni-Vibe-cum-CE-2 pedal. The big game changer will be when I embrace a two-amp setup and get all Pete Cornish with the switching and effects loops."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"Bad Cat Cub 30R, 2014 model. Clear, loud, balanced, classy, great with single coils and humbuckers. My two main guitars are a 2015 Suhr Antique Classic Strat and a 2007 PRS Singlecut. My back-up Strat is a 1986 Japanese Squier in Olympic White."

What lessons have you learned along the way?
"I'm looking for reliable, top-drawer tones that will work in the real world of gigging. The key is to build on a high-quality core tone, which comes from guitar and amp."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

Artist: Liam Cromby - **We Are The Ocean**

Photo courtesy of: Ben Gibson Photography

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

STEVE HARLEY

The cockney folk hero talks us through the albums that make him smile...

Steve Harley and his band Cockney Rebel enjoyed worldwide success in the 1970s, with *Make Me Smile (Come Up And See Me)* reaching number one in the UK singles chart. It is one of the most played songs in British broadcast history and features in a number of movies. Harley formed the band after beginning his musical career floor-spotting (singing for free as a member of the audience) in London clubs, then joining folk act Odin. He continues to perform live, and has written songs for many other artists, including Rod Stewart. He's also acted in West End shows, is involved in racehorse ownership and has been hailed for his extensive charity work.

The Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel Best Days Of Our Lives 40th Anniversary UK Tour runs throughout November

Frank Zappa
APOSTROPHE

"Zappa simply had everything: great skill as a player, fantastic imagination as a lyricist and an ear for melody that could be reminiscent at one moment of Gershwin, and Cole Porter the next. Controlled eccentricity is the dominant impression I get from what is an album forever in my top 10 of all time."

Cat Stevens
GREATEST HITS

"Of course, Yusuf is mainly a singer-songwriter, and doesn't play lead guitar at all, but his main man – Alun Davies – is an acoustic accompanist from the top drawer. I cite, especially, his romantic runs that weave in and out of his boss's classic songs, like *Father And Son*, *Tiny Dancer*, *How Can I Tell You* – the list is pretty well endless."

Martin Simpson
PRODIGAL SON

"I first saw Martin on a TV clip, accompanying June Tabor. He was magnificent. The claw-hammer picking and the varied tunings were so musical, I was quick to hit the record button to make sure he was actually that good. He's also (as is usually the case with talented artists) a really nice man. In our business, only the mediocre are difficult."

The Who
THEN AND NOW

"This is a collection I play in my car often. Pete Townshend is never going to compete with the great lead players, but his rhythm and smash style is unique, and any guitarist with more than two brain cells recognises him as a major influence. With The Who, you get the lot: songs with melody and fine lyrics, and enormous productions with Townshend ruling."

Richard Thompson
YOU? ME? US?

"Where do you start? I played floor-spotter sets during his intervals in Bunjie's and Les Cousins, major folk clubs in London, in the early 70s. He was mesmerising on acoustic. On electric, too, he's the real deal. *She Cut Off Her Long Silken Hair* and *Razor Dance* are outstanding. His voice takes a bit of getting used to, but once over that, magic is there for the taking!"

Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel
LOVE'S A PRIMA DONNA

"This is not self-indulgence, I swear! I gave free rein to Jim Cregan during the recordings and he rewarded me with some brilliant parts, which I could harmonise with the keyboards. The more outlandish my production became, the more Jim pushed himself. Cockney Rebel started as a non-guitar band, and here we are offering up lashings of electric mayhem!"

Adrian Belew
THE LONE RHINO

"This album opened a few jaded eyes. The 80s didn't start too promisingly, but then we heard this. Adrian Belew was always going to be first-rate, having stayed the course with proper thinkers like Zappa and Bowie, but *The Lone Rhino* is a real treat. I have a soft spot for the eccentric, the ones who do it differently; the ones who break the rules and create new sets."

Joni Mitchell
LADIES OF THE CANYON

"Joni and her tunings! She picks elegantly and melodically, and part of the magic on most of her albums comes from the mad musicality – the tunings! I've got no idea how many different tunings she uses, but I've ascertained several, and I use them myself from time to time. Joni Mitchell: the complete article."

Johnny Marr
PLAYLAND

"The most complete musician to come out of the 80s. He delivers good songs, stylish riffs and special touches. The Smiths were a major influence on plenty that came after them, and a major contribution to that was Marr's stylish and artful playing; plus, like I said, talented people are usually darn good company and modest. I can attest that Johnny Marr is both."

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THE BARD OF BARKING

Billy Bragg tells *G&B* about keeping it simple with his live rig, his Burns Steer, the infamous Portastack, dissent in England and being the Bard of Barking

Story & photography **Sam Atkins**

"I always end my set with, 'My name is Billy Bragg, I'm from Barking, Essex', even though I don't live there anymore, I'm quite proud of being the Bard of Barking. The music press in the old days used to give those sort of appellations out, like Paul Weller was the 'Woking Wonder'."

Billy Bragg settles in to a hard plastic chair, one of those you find in a classroom, looking every bit the well-worn folk traveller in a venue unlike any on his fast-selling-out UK tour. Our view from the makeshift green room, a clear glass-fronted education suite, is the impressively dominant Lincoln Cathedral, atop the appropriately named Steep Hill. This lunchtime, Bragg will be reading from a 3,500-word essay on freedom to a small audience in The Collection Museum, a sprawling modernist building with historical exhibitions covering everything from the Roman occupancy to avant-garde art, a far cry from Bragg's early years trekking around the pub circuit of the late 70s.

The medieval city of Lincoln has been celebrating the 800th anniversary of the sealing of the Magna Carta, and Bragg makes up an impressive line-up alongside such notable figures as historian David Starkey, The Levellers and musicians banned in their countries from performing their music, including Ramy Essam and Fermin Muguruza. During the 10-day Festival800 programme, themes such as freedom of speech and justice will be at the fore; principles he has never shied away from.

"I get asked to do stuff, y'know, like speaking at a school or what have you. But I often get invited to take part in things that I don't really think they grasp where I'm coming from. It's like people interviewing you about something you don't know anything about. There's no point. If you can't be enthusiastic about something, if you haven't got an opinion; you can't just be rent-a-gob, I don't want to do that.

> "I often get invited to take part in things that I don't really think they grasp where I'm coming from"

"Every now and again, you get asked to do something more than a gig and it's really good to take those opportunities when they come up, so performing here and then doing this talk and Q&A today was the right thing for me."

The night before, Bragg played to a sold-out Lincoln Drill Hall, a former military and police training centre dating back to the 1890s. The stage was lit starkly in white and purple, with a solitary vocal mic, two dual-channel amps (one acting as a back-up), his custom-made Jim Dyson Tele-type guitar and just two pedals (trusty Boss TU-3s – one for acoustic and one for electric) at his feet.

This economy of stage craft is the antithesis of modern-day performances that rely on the extreme to capture the hearts and minds of their audiences. Bragg clearly doesn't need trinkets to connect to his audience. His well-travelled and distinctive vocals, heavy >

Bragg's stunning custom-made Jim Dyson Tone Deluxe

Gear requirements include an amp that has two channels – one for clean and one for overdrive

percussive playing style – with his amps set clean and full with a hint of overdrive on the second channel – is direct and engaging.

"Basically, I need an amplifier that has two channels for a clean and a dirty sound. I need a way of changing channels, so a footswitch or a button on the amp and an inline tuner and I'm ready to rock. I like the Fender Hot Rod Devilles, but I can use any two-channel amp. I started off last night with the dirty channel for the songs *Levi Stubbs' Tears*, *The World Turned Upside Down* and *Why Do We Build The Walls*, and the clean channel is on for *Must I Paint You a Picture*, *Distant Shore* and the ballads. If I was at a festival I'd keep the dirty channel on all the time to cut through the sibilance and leakage from other stages. I'm more of a dirty-channel than a clean-channel guy if left to my own devices."

Our attention then turns to Bragg's main stage guitar, the Jim Dyson Tone Deluxe, a Tele-type guitar that feels light due to the chambering, but no less meaty in the hands with its flat but wide neck that sits comfortably in your grip. So how did it find its way into Bragg's possession?

"He really makes pickups, Jim Dyson, and works out of somewhere near Melbourne. He doesn't actually make guitars anymore. I was playing with my band at the time, The Blokes, with Lu Edmonds, who plays with Public Image and Ben Mandelson, who played with the Amazorblades. Both of them play a lot of world music and are always buying weird foreign instruments and sticking pickups on them, so they know Jim from that. So Jim came down to the soundcheck one day carrying this Tone Deluxe and gave it to me to try out and I kind of liked it. It's a utilitarian-type guitar based on a Fender Telecaster but with four positions, giving me a bit more crunch, which are controlled by a chicken head dial selector knob. The sort of guitar I need is like a Kalashnikov; you can drop it in a puddle and it still works. Something I can walk out with, plug it in and beat the shit out of it and it more or less stays in tune. I've got quite heavy strings on it, 52s, so I can give it some right old punishment and it can handle it."

> "The sort of guitar I need is like a Kalashnikov... I can beat the shit out of it and it more or less stays in tune"

For acoustic duties, Bragg favours Gibson guitars to give him that low-down thump and bark. "I use a three-year-old Gibson J-45 now. I had a really nice Gibson 000-type guitar, but accidentally fell out of a window on top of it. That's a story for another time! I did a tour doing *Mermaid Avenue* songs for the Woody Guthrie centenary in 2012 and the Gibson 000 was brilliant for that. But it wouldn't really work with the band on the *Tooth And Nail* tour, so I needed a proper acoustic and the J-45 is really good for that."

Bragg has travelled far and wide since his formative years in Essex. Failing his eleven-plus exam led to Barking's then-named Park Secondary Modern School, where Bragg took to music for his education and bands such as The Faces and The Rolling Stones were his teachers. But after seeing the Stones and The Who in concert in the late- 70s and the distance between them and their audiences, the immediacy and energy of punk bands such as The Clash ignited a flame inside the young Bragg.

With his next door neighbour Phillip Wigg, more affectionately known as 'Wiggy', Bragg formed the band Riff Raff, toured the pub >

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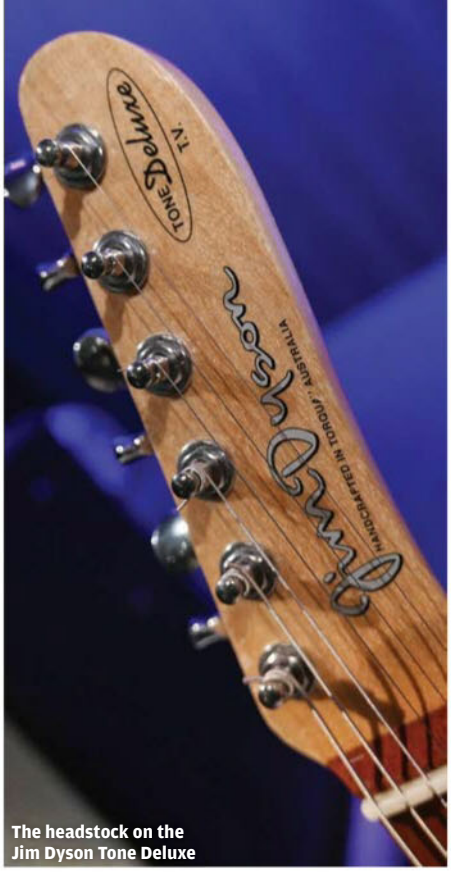
"I like the Fender Hot Rod Devilles, but I can use any two-channel amp"



The headstock on the Jim Dyson Tone Deluxe

The Tone Deluxe: "It's a utilitarian-type guitar"

circuits with their take on the punk rock genre and managed to record a few singles, which unfortunately stalled the band and led to its break-up after a few years.

"I was really into those early guitar bands and into singer-songwriters, particularly Bob Dylan," says Bragg. "Seeing as his songs were three chords, I was able to play a lot of those. I knew Woody Guthrie was important because of Dylan, but his records were really hard to get hold of in the 70s. I didn't really hear any Woody stuff until I went to America in 1984 and you could buy his records.

"It was punk, though, that made it possible for people to play, to become a musician, to open the door to people like me. Punk made me write songs that were contemporary, rather than songs reaching back to be a bit like Dylan, The Stones and the 60s. That was the precursor that led me to write like Billy Bragg, although it still took me a bit to write like that, but punk lit the fire under it."

> "It was punk that made it possible for people to play, to become a musician, to open the door to people like me"

An iconic piece of the puzzle that makes up the unique look and sound of Billy Bragg is his Burns Steer guitar. The Steer was a unique-looking semi-hollow guitar with a beefy split humbucking pickup in the bridge and a Tri-Sonic single coil at the neck, both made by Burns.

"The Burns Steer is the first guitar I ever bought that looked great and sounded great. Most of the time, guitars look great or sound great, but seldom do both the same. That high treble sound it's got was very conducive to my style of playing, which can best be described as 'chop and clang'! I'm basically a rhythm guitar player. Anything that's not rhythm guitar is difficult for me to do the same every night. When I was in a band you would only really notice what I was doing if I stopped playing. There'd be a hole where I was. All the stuff I do, really, is rhythm, so that guitar really suited my percussive playing style.

"It weighs a ton, though. It probably weighs more than that table [pointing towards a trestle table laden down with tea and coffee urns]. I think the one I've got is a prototype, as it's got a 00001 number on it. I've only ever seen one other one and that was a black one in the Dutch segment of Live Aid! All these Dutch musicians were on the stage and there's this one guy on the end playing this black Burns Steer and I was like 'whoa...'. I'd never seen another original before. The reissues were good, but sadly they didn't make a metal plate under the soundhole, but put a plastic plate on, which didn't have the same effect."

There was one other piece of musical gear that made Bragg really stand out from the crowd, and that was the Portastack. With a wry smile on his face, he tells *G&B* about it.

"We put it together for the new music seminar in New York in 1984. I'm sorry to say the Portastack got lost somewhere. Thank fuck it did. It was a heavy piece of gear. It was powered by a large battery, which was heavy, on a frame of a backpack, so most of the weight was around your diaphragm, so singing with it on was a real pain in the arse. The speakers were on two stalks above your head, which were held up by wing nuts, so occasionally it would drop around your head and feed back in your ear.

"If you went through a doorway it always fed back, too. It was a fucking crazy contraption that I complained bitterly about having to use, but my manager at the time said to me, 'If you use this then you'll get noticed'. The annoying thing is that 30 years later people still talk to me about it. It was like I was a weird superhero appearing, like Doc Oc from Spiderman. At the end of that tour I took it home and quietly disposed of it."

Music and politics have always been good bedfellows throughout history, and Bragg uses the power of his choppy rhythmic playing to grandstand his political views. When it comes to songwriting what is his creative process?

"It's usually in response to something that's happened," he says. "If I think I've got something to say about it in a song I will sit down and write it and get it out online as a free download. I wrote a song a couple of years ago called *Never Buy The Sun* about the phone hacking scandal. I literally wrote it on a Friday, recorded it on the Saturday and it was out for Monday on the internet. That's what a good topical song does.

"The last record, *Tooth And Nail,* was after I came out of a long period of where my mum passed away in 2011 and I really needed to do something to get onto the next thing. My partner Juliet, who manages me, said to me >

GEAR *Billy Bragg*

- **Guitars** Burns Steer, Jim Dyson Tele-type, Gibson J-45 with LR Baggs onboard electrics
- **Amps** Fender Hot Rod Deville, Supro Dual-tone 1624t (back-up amp loaned for the Lincoln gig)
- **Pedals** Boss TU-3, LR Baggs DI

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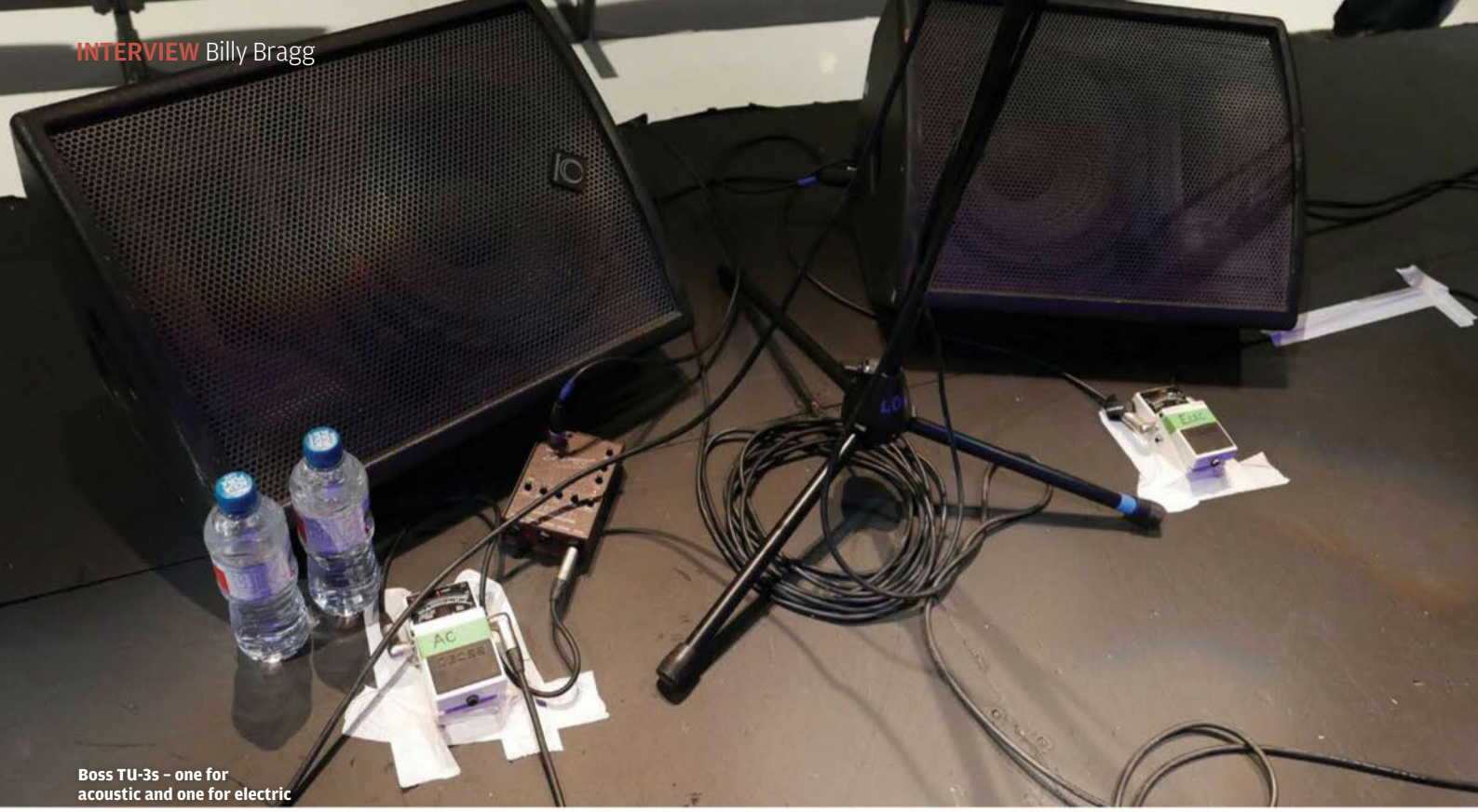

Boss TU-3s – one for acoustic and one for electric

Supro Dual-tone 1624t and Fender Hot Rod Deville

'You really should make another album' and I was like, 'Whoa, I suppose so'. The trouble with making another album is that it's a lot of blood and a lot of treasure over a long period. You've got to finance the album, finance the promotion, finance the band, finance the touring, so it's a big ask these days.

"So Joe Henry, an old friend of mine, who's a record producer and singer-songwriter, had been saying to me for a long time that he could make an album in his basement in five days with his band that's got Gregg Leisz, Jay Bellerose and Dave Piltch in it. Amazing guys to play with. So I rang him up and said, 'Did you mean it when you said you could make a record in five days?' and he said, 'Yeah'. So that was in the August and he booked me in in the January. So when I got the bill for that it stimulated me to get writing!

"It's a bit like today. I could have written these 3,500 words last month, but there I was sitting in the hotel this morning getting the last 1,000 words together. I was always bad with handing in homework."

> "Playing the guitar has furnished me with an education and taken me to amazing places. You won't get that on social media"

We're minutes away from Bragg making his way down to deliver his talk to a decidedly mixed crowd of young people, families and his peers. I ask him one final question: "You have said that 'England is a nation that has been defined by dissent'. What do you mean by that, and does music in 2015 still play an active role in poking a stick where it needs to be poked?"

"No. Music has lost it's vanguard as a vehicle for dissent," he replies. "When I was 19 and I wanted to express my anger about the world, nobody was asking me to write in a newspaper or come to a lecture, so I had to play guitar, write songs and do gigs. That was the only option open to me. If I wanted to get my words out there I had to negotiate with the BBC and the *NME* to do that. Now, if you're 19 you've got a number of options, like posting to Facebook, call up a crowd on Twitter, write a blog or make a film on your phone. There's loads of ways to express your dissent. People don't listen to music as I did back then to find out what my generation was thinking. They go to social media to find out what they're thinking. Music is still capable of doing that job of carrying a message. No one is going to ask you to come to Lincoln to read out your tweets!

"If you really want to see the world and get to speak to people all over like I've done, then being able to play the guitar has furnished me with an education and taken me to amazing places. You're not going to get that if you sit on your arse whinging on social media. I would still say it's worth getting out there and learning how to play and engage with people through music because there's something more you get from music that you don't get from online. It's a sense of communion with a group of people. When you sing together there's a moment there of solidarity. It doesn't have to be a political song, but a song that brings up that feeling that is shared with a lot of people, you're not alone, and that's a powerful affirmation. Music still has a very important role to play and I think that explains in some way why more people are going to gigs now, because you can't get that feeling on the internet."

Billy Bragg's *Live At The Union Chapel* CD and DVD boxset is available now

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Guitar & Bass LEGENDS

JIMMY LAFAVE

It's 30 years since singer-songwriter Jimmy LaFave emerged with a sound honed from what he calls "red dirt music". Here, he talks jumbos, baritones and "crazy-looking" Japanese electrics...

Story **Michael Heatley**

If anything's likely to confirm your reputation as a guitar geek, it's featuring a collectable six-string on your album cover. Step forward Austin, Texas's Jimmy LaFave, whose new release, *The Night Tribe,* features not one but three interesting instruments on its cover (see p36).

The acoustic to the left, the least eye-catching of the trio, is in fact the most important and has a history we'll cover later. The one on the right is a Harmony Rebel and no longer in his possession. "I traded that one in the last few months. I like trading, as most guitar guys do," he says.

But pride of place goes to the gold Sekova LaFave's cradling in his lap. "Though it's on the cover, I didn't play electric on my new record – two albums ago, on *Blue Nightfall*, I used that guitar a lot."

Sekova guitars were imported from Japan by US Musical Merchandise of New York, and this one is a Grecian, circa 1968. "That came out of my favourite music store in town years ago," he adds. "The owner gave it me free 'cause he thought it was so odd. It was way before they became collectable. I have one in red, one in gold, with a matching [red] bass."

And so to the Taylor acoustic LaFave describes as "definitely my workhorse – it's about 20 years old. It's a copy of one that got stolen from a hotel room in Columbus, Ohio. They don't make that model anymore, the black maple Jumbo, but they made me another... Taylor have been really good to me."

The instrument has been through the wars during LaFave's decades on the road turning out some of the most original and unheralded music on the Americana scene. "I was in a car wreck where it got mangled a little bit, but I had a guy piece it back together. Then a year ago, in the middle of a gig, I left it on its stand. When I got around to playing it, it had spontaneously developed a huge crack down the side, almost split in half. It's the only one of my guitars that has had major surgery."

The Taylor has several sisters in LaFave's guitar armoury, most notably a pair of baritones. "They have a lot deeper, different sound," he says. "For me, as a songwriter, they open up different possibilities."

The standard six-string baritone has an unusual eight-string counterpart. "It's the two middle strings that are different. It's kinda like a 12-string, yet not quite as ringy – that was part of their whole spiel about how doubling two small strings and two big strings gave it an extra dimension. I used that two weekends ago at some shows in Atlanta."

The six-string baritone is one of Taylor's 35th anniversary models. "They only made 35 of those in that particular sunburst," says LaFave, who also owns three Taylor acoustic basses. "They are really hard to find these days. A couple of records back I had my bass player use it, 'cause I really like the tone."

Rivalling the Sekovas for distinctive looks is another Japanese-made semi-hollow instrument by Greco, called the Shrike. It's notable for its L-shaped split-coil pickups, known as boomerangs.

"I first ran across one when a buddy of mine in a music shop in Oklahoma showed

LaFave uses his Taylor baritone frequently in live shows

LaFave's Taylor 8-string baritone

The Jerry Jones baritone is a firm favourite

me a 12-string version. I was intrigued, so he said 'Here, use it as long as you want'. I had it a few years, and when I came across this one I snatched it up and sent the 12-string back. I took it down to the studio listening room to jam some ideas on the new record. It's very playable, very cool."

LaFave admits that the array of rocker switches the Greco shares with the Sekovas is confusing. "A lot of those Japanese guitars have them. There are different switches on the red Sekova compared to my gold one. I asked the gentleman who rewired my red one what the original intent was of those staggered pickups, and he didn't know. Sometimes, it's a very subtle difference – one pickup off and one pickup on, combine the sounds and so on. You play around and figure out what seems to be the best."

LaFave admits he used to hang his "crazy-looking Japanese guitars" on the wall as conversation pieces, but playability is also important. "It can't just be something to look at 'cos it's weird-looking. Some of them you wouldn't want to use in a show because they don't stay in tune, even after you get someone to work on them. All the ones I have are playable, otherwise I sell or trade them."

The music on *The Night Tribe* is relatively elaborate, with female backing vocals, keyboards and even a string section. Yet LaFave toured Europe this autumn with just lead guitar and bass flanking his acoustic.

"If the budget allows I add a drummer and, after that, a keyboard," he explains. So, we wonder, how does LaFave tackle these songs with fewer people?

"We have to strip them down. Anthony [Da Costa] played nearly all the guitar on that record, so he's the driving sound, along with me. So as long as he's along, they're pretty close. One of the pedals on my board, an Electro-Harmonix C9, I use with the acoustic, so when I'm playing there's a nice organ pad under me to fill out the sound. Anthony is a genius on pedals."

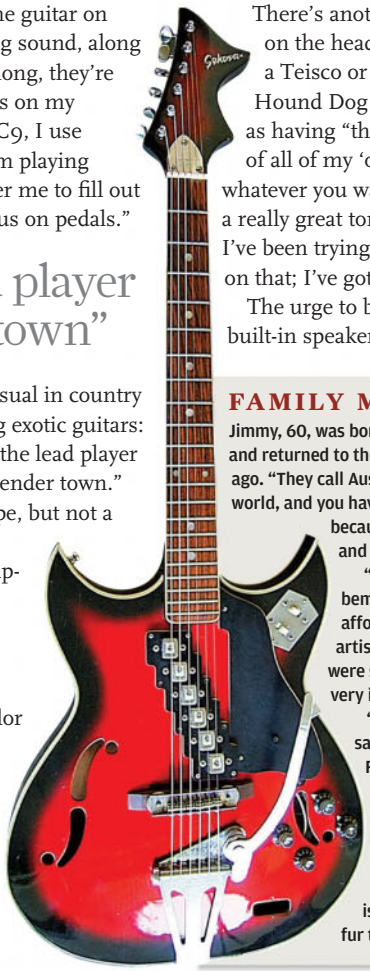
> "In every band I've ever had, the lead player plays a Tele. Austin's a real Fender town"

LaFave concedes he is unusual in country and roots circles in preferring exotic guitars: "In every band I've ever had, the lead player plays a Tele. Austin's a real Fender town." His main electric is a Tele-type, but not a Fender. "It's a Bill Lawrence Swampkaster, made of swamp-ash wood from Louisiana. I played that for many years, and it's the one I use on my records when I play electric."

While LaFave uses his Taylor Jumbo and Taylor Baritone six-strings almost exclusively in his shows, he's been known to take the Dano-esque Jerry Jones Baritone instead of the latter. "I'll use the electric to save a little space in the car, rather than the big baritone in its road case. The electric definitely sounds different – some people might say it's subtle, but to me it's huge. I've had this about 15 years and use it on my records double-tracking guitars."

There's another guitar with no name on the headstock LaFave believes is a Teisco or Kawai, like that used by Hound Dog Taylor. He credits this as having "the best-sounding pickups of all of my 'off-brand', 'trash' guitars, whatever you want to call them. They have a really great tone that's totally their own. I've been trying to learn to play slide guitar on that; I've got it in open tuning."

The urge to buy a Silvertone with a built-in speaker, as sold by mail-order >



FAMILY MATTERS

Jimmy, 60, was born in Texas, raised in Oklahoma and returned to the Lone Star State three decades ago. "They call Austin the live music capital of the world, and you have to be on the top of your game because of the quality of the players and writers here," he says.

"Like every other city, people bemoan the changes – 'It's not affordable, they're pricing the real artists out of town'. I'm sure people were saying that in the 80s, but it's a very inspiring city to make music.

"I pronounce it La-Fayve," he says of his surname. "I'm sure the French say La-Faahve. One of my family members has traced it back to my French-Canadian great-great-grandfather, a French fur trapper in Hudson Bay. My dad's side of the family is from South Dakota, where the fur trappers ended up."

LaFave believes this is a Teisco, as played by Hound Dog Taylor

A Greco Shrike – notable for its L-shaped split-coil pickups

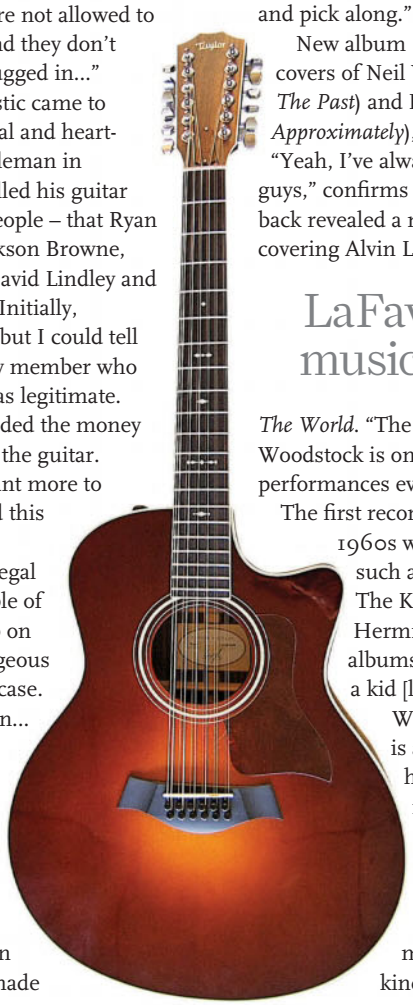
A Ryan acoustic bequeathed by "a gentleman in California"

catalogues back in the 50s and early 60s, was inspired by seeing Jackson Browne play one. "I found that on eBay 10 years ago," he says, "and have used that in some of the showcase rooms in Austin. You're not allowed to amplify your guitar, and they don't count that as being plugged in..."

LaFave's Ryan acoustic came to him in a highly unusual and heart-warming way. "A gentleman in California died and willed his guitar collection to various people – that Ryan to me, a Gibson to Jackson Browne, some other guitar to David Lindley and another to Bill Frisell. Initially, I was a bit suspicious, but I could tell by talking to the family member who contacted me that it was legitimate. I said if her family needed the money I didn't want to accept the guitar. She assured me it meant more to them that they fulfilled this gentleman's wish.

"I filled out a lot of legal paperwork, and a couple of years later it turned up on my doorstep in its gorgeous turquoise blue Calton case. The guitar is alive again... I used it in a video recently, too. The neck is wider than most acoustics I own, so it's interesting."

The smallest guitar in the house is a Papoose that hangs in his living room. "It's made by Tacoma, tuned C to C, and is another interesting sound – like you've capo'd up to the fifth fret or something. It's so comfortable and small, I grab it when I'm watching TV and pick along."



New album *The Road Tribe* includes covers of Neil Young (*Journey Through The Past*) and Bob Dylan (*Queen Jane Approximately*), among the original songs. "Yeah, I've always admired both of those guys," confirms LaFave, who a while back revealed a more unlikely hero when covering Alvin Lee's *Rock & Roll Music To The World*. "The version of *Going Home* from Woodstock is one of the most incredible lead performances ever recorded."

The first records LaFave listened to in the 1960s were British Invasion acts, such as Gerry and the Pacemakers, The Kinks and even Herman's Hermits. "We had three or four albums of theirs in the house as a kid [laughs]; I became a big fan."

When asked what his main aim is as an artist, LaFave says: "To hopefully make music that my fans like... to try and be me. Every few years, I try to find new players to shake the molecules about, to get a different sound, but I've had musicians for 20 years, so it's kind of mix and match."

LaFave recently played a show as guest of Red Bolkart, "In my opinion, one of the greatest guitar players in the world; it was an honour to play with him. He played many years with Merle Haggard. He kinda looks like a viking and has short, stubby fingers. It's amazing, he's so dextrous – in terms of country Tele picking, he's the master. For someone like me, it's like playing with Eric Clapton. I'm thinking ahead to my next record already!"

Red Bolkart and a red Sekova – now that would be some combination...

LaFave's main aim is: "To hopefully make music that my fans like... to try and be me"

LISTEN UP

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JIMMY LAFAVE
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CHRISSIE HYNDE

How I got started...

Reckless rebel

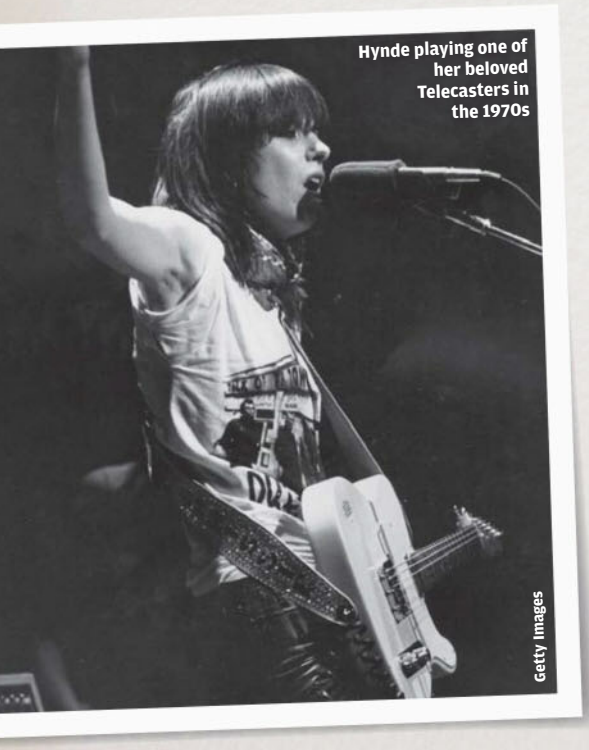
In a new *Guitar & Bass* series, we ask iconic musicians to cast their minds back to what made them pick up the guitar in the first place. We kick off with Pretenders legend Chrissie Hynde

Story **David Gallant**

Look on the Akron, Ohio city website and you'll find Chrissie Hynde feted as one of the city's most famous daughters. Not that she's about to publicise the fact, and it's somewhat ironic that over 40 years ago she couldn't wait to get out of the place. Growing up in the city's 'comfortable' suburbs, Hynde wanted to get more out of life than buying into the proverbial 'American Dream'. As she says: "I moved out of Akron because there was no downtown area in the 60s – you couldn't move downtown and get an apartment. It was all mall culture."

The first album Hynde owned was *Meet The Beatles,* and like many kids in their early teens she wanted to be in a band, "so I bought a ukulele. Then I got into the whole hippy band culture thing, listening to bands like Moby Grape, Buffalo Springfield, Jefferson Airplane, The Velvet Underground and some of the British bands like The Rolling Stones and The Kinks. I was also a great James Brown fan, as I loved rhythm guitar, which was of course a major part of his sound. But I suppose my greatest influences came from those that were more local, like Mitch Ryder And The Detroit Wheels, The Paul Butterfield Blues Band and, although he wasn't from Akron or Cleveland, Alice Cooper, who used to play around the area. He had a great band... one of the best."

> "The best thing to have a good sound onstage is to have a smaller amp and crank it"



Hynde playing one of her beloved Telecasters in the 1970s

Getty Images

In fact, Hynde caught up with anyone and everyone who came through Akron or Cleveland. "The Stooges were local too, but I didn't become a mad-keen Iggy Pop fan 'til I discovered David Bowie," she says. "I saw the first gig that David did in the States, when he came to Ohio – I was at the soundcheck. He really got me refocused. But by 1972 it looked as though it was all over. A lot of people had died. From 1967-1971, it kind of started to go a little downhill – the hippy thing morphed into a Hawkwind-cum-punk thing."

In 1973, Hynde moved to the UK. "I came with three albums, didn't know anybody, didn't have a policy," she remembers, "but figured I could work it out. Between '73 and '79 I did a whole lot of travelling. I spent a lot of time looking for a band – and had a lot of false starts... I finally got The Pretenders together in '78." Hynde's songwriting developed because "I couldn't really play along to records. I was alone in my room most of the time with my guitar, so I just had to write my own tunes so I had something to play. Then I realised that I liked to sing, and with just a few chords there are possibilities for melodies – and I kind of stuck there. I regret it now... no, I don't regret it, because it's done well for me. But if I hadn't been able to sing or write songs, I might have developed more as a guitar player – but I got a little sidetracked by the songwriting thing.

"I love my Telecaster. I've got a couple, and I guess once you get used to the sound... and it's also good for rhythm playing... and just the feel of it. I've had one for 35 years, and I also had a really lovely Strat. My guitar player's so good, I said 'you should be playing this' – so now he's got it. I found a new Tele they had up at John Henry's, I think it had humbuckers on it – it's like a hybrid guitar and I thought it was sweet, so I used that on a couple of shows. I also had a beautiful Tele that was made by Philippe Dubreuille, a French maker." Hynde also owns "two nice little acoustic Martins – you know, the ones with the brown body, not the blonde top".

Amplifiers are covered by Fender and Ampeg. "What I like is small amps, because with a small amp you can crank it up and play

Hynde performing at the iTunes Festival at the Roundhouse in London last year

Getty Images

it loud," says Hynde. "When I look back to the 60s/70s TV shows, the bands sounded really good. But when they got to the 80s, they sounded really shitty. People started using bigger amps so they could play in great big arenas and stuff. The best thing to have a good sound onstage is to have a smaller amp and crank it. If you can keep the stage sound relatively quiet and you can get the sound guy to crank it through the PA, thats how your band's going to sound the best. It's way better than everybody turning up the volume so you get a wall of sound – and that doesn't sound very good out in the hall. But nobody will agree with me on that because that's a guy's thing. Also, it's better for the singer because you don't have to battle everything and have to start screaming. And if you scream and you're a woman, no one wants to hear that."

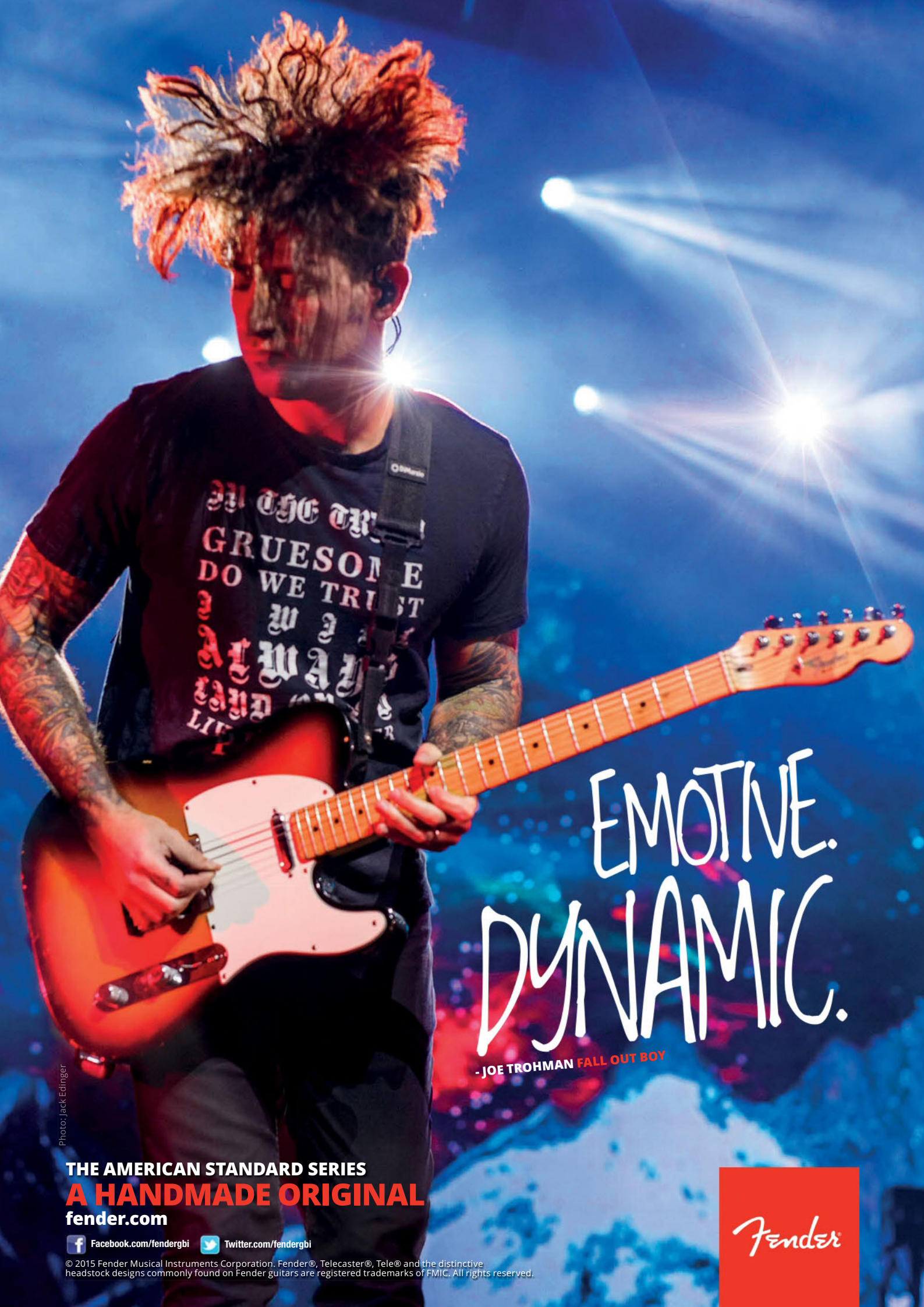
Jazz club

"You know, I love jazz," Hynde reflects, but I'm more of a rock person. Mose Allison had more of an influence on English songwriters than anyone – The Kinks and The Who wouldn't have existed without Mose Allison. You would never have had *My Generation* or *You Really Got Me* without Mose Allison.

"I don't think there is anyone who has surpassed Mose as far as an influence. There was a man with a piano and a glass of water. He never got too big, he was never a household name. He influenced all the greats and kept his profile really low, and he consistently made amazing records. To me, that's a hero. Doing his thing and keeping it underground. That sums it up for me. He would never consider himself to be rock 'n' roll, but he is. He's very true to himself.

"Mose has influenced a lot of guitar players – his chord structure and everything. But as far as rock guitar goes, I think Jeff Beck is the best rock guitarist there is. He's such a virtuoso, I can get him to play anything. When he gets into his jazz areas, no one can rival him – he's also unrivalled as a rock guitar player, but that doesn't seem to turn him on so much. I'll put my cards on the table: jazz is a more sophisticated, more elevated and a more pure form of music than rock 'n' roll [Hynde's brother is a jazz musician]. The jazz culture was getting dumbed down, and when rock 'n' roll took over, everything was going in that direction. Even jazz musicians got involved in it. It's turning around now and pure jazz is going to reign – at least I'd like to think so. I have a feeling, because it's got real thin on the ground and real shitty in the last few years – you know, the little girls in their underwear thing. I love the 'glam' of rock 'n' roll – the New York Dolls, Iggy Pop, David Bowie, and it's a lot of fun – and that's where my thing rests. But as far as the bigger picture goes, the influence of jazz and so forth, I think everything's going to get a little better and we'll forget all this talent show bullshit. And I'm going to play the guitar properly before I die – that's my one goal."

Chrissie Hynde's new biography, *Reckless*, is out now, published by Ebury Press



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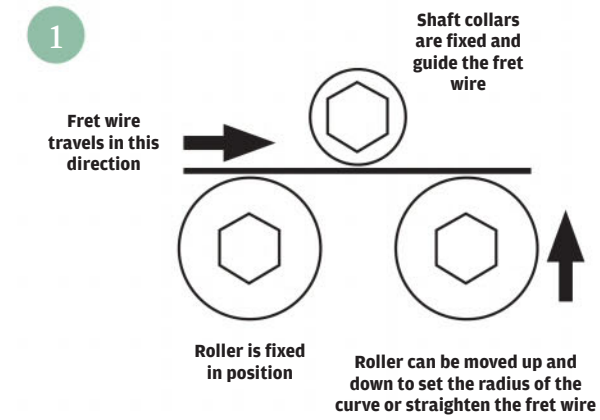
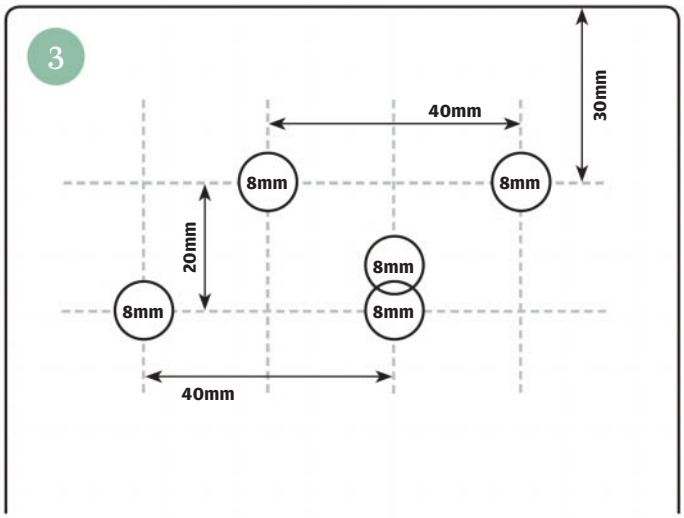
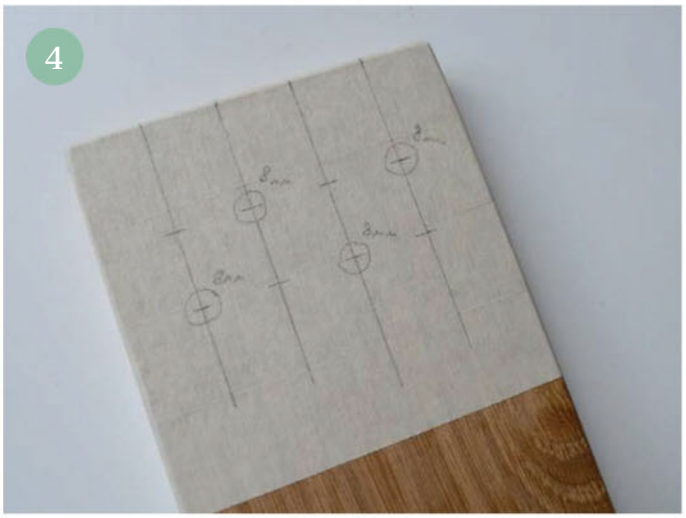
DIY WORKSHOP

FRET BENDER

If you are a would-be luthier, this might be among the most useful workshops we have carried out. It's a simple, quick and cheap little project that can save you a lot of money. **HUW PRICE** builds a tool for bending and straightening fret wire







1 This diagram shows the basic mechanism of the fret bender. The roller on the bottom right can be moved upwards to tighten the radius of the curve

2 This project doesn't call for too many parts. The important thing is to make sure everything fits. With 8mm bolts, you'll need 8mm washers and nuts. The inside diameters of the roller bearings and the shaft collars must be 8mm, too

3 These measurements worked out well for us, and the bender will be able to accommodate fret wire of various heights

4 Covering the wood with masking tape makes it easier to mark out for drilling

Some seemingly daunting guitar jobs are not as difficult as you might imagine, provided you have the correct tools. Installing fret wire is certainly one of those, and once you have done it a couple of times it will never hold any fears for you again.

Unfortunately, the first difficulty you will encounter is that fret wire is sold in ruler-straight lengths, but pretty much all guitars have radiused fingerboards. If you try to tap straight fret wire into a curved fingerboard, the ends of the frets will pull straight up. To avoid this, the straight fret wire must be bent to a curve that matches the fingerboard radius. Very slightly over-radiusing is acceptable, too.

Years ago, when I did my first re-frets, I used pliers to bend the fret wire. The jaws had to be wrapped with masking tape to stop the pliers scratching the fret wire, and achieving an accurate and consistent curve was almost impossible. Worse still, the wire would often twist as it was being bent – and straight wire is essential for straight fret slots.

Then, for a number of years, a pro luthier friend kindly indulged my amateur lutherie adventures by bending fret wire for me with his Stewart MacDonald fret bending tool. I really wanted one, but they cost over £80 before postage and import duty. Crimson Guitars, here in the UK, also sells a very nice looking fret bender, but that costs a whisker under £90.

There are cheaper options but, as is so often the case, an evening of research turned up a wide range of home-brew fret bender designs. Inspired and enthused, I decided I would try making one myself.

Operating principle

To bend fret wire, it has to be guided along rollers that are slightly offset. When the path is not straight, the wire has to bend to pass through and, due to its low elasticity, once the metal is bent it tends to stay bent. So the roller offset determines the radius of the bend in the wire. Some sort of guide is essential to prevent the wire twisting, and friction must be as low as possible if the device is to work easily 1.

Parts

The most difficult aspect of this project was sourcing some of the parts, because they're not exactly the types of item you can pick up at your local DIY depot. As always, the problem is finding a single supplier who has all the bits you need. When you factor in often extortionate postage and packaging costs if you are forced to buy from several suppliers, seemingly cheap DIY projects can end up being more expensive than you thought.

Eventually, I stumbled across a UK company called Bearing Boys (www.bearingboys.co.uk).

Described as an 'independent bearing and transmissions' company, they stock all the bits necessary for this project.

In addition to basic nuts and bolts, you'll need such exotic items as sealed miniature steel ball bearings and shaft collars. Don't worry, everything will be made clear very soon, and there's a comprehensive parts list with product codes on page 45 2.

You'll also need a backing board to mount the parts. I went to my local timber merchant and got an offcut from an 18mm-thick plank of white oak. Most hardwoods will be suitable for the job, but avoid softwoods such as pine because it will wear out too quickly.

Wood work

To make things clearer, I applied masking tape over the wood and marked out the positions where I needed to drill the holes. It is fairly essential to have an accurate set square and a ruler for this part. I measured 2cm intervals across the top, then used the set square to draw lines from top to bottom 3.

Next, I marked 3cm from the top on the two outside lines and joined them up using the set square. I repeated this 2cm below and drew four circles where the holes needed to be drilled 4.

To get this fret bender to work smoothly and accurately, it's essential to drill into the wood perfectly square. A press drill would be ideal, but I use a drill press from Axminster Tools. Costing about £15, it has provided years of service and makes it easy to drill square into flat boards, or even walls. Just look it up online it and you'll see a range of different options.

All the bolts in this project are 8mm in diameter, so I'd suggest using an 8mm bradawl bit or a Forstner bit for accuracy. Three of the holes are straightforward, but you'll need to drill two holes for the movable bearing – about a centimetre apart 5. You should end up with a figure-of-eight shape, then you can clean up the sides of the hole to create a slot in which the bearing bolt can be moved up and down 6.

Putting it all together

To function as a fret bender, only three of the holes are used. In fact, you won't have to bother with the fourth hole if you don't need to straighten fret wire. Start by pushing a washer over a 4cm long bolt and push it through the hole drilled for the first roller from the back of the board. Add a second washer from the front, then twist on a nut and tighten everything up. Put a roller bearing 7 onto the protruding part of the bolt, then fix it in position using a lock nut with a nylon insert. Only the bearing should spin, not the bolt 8.

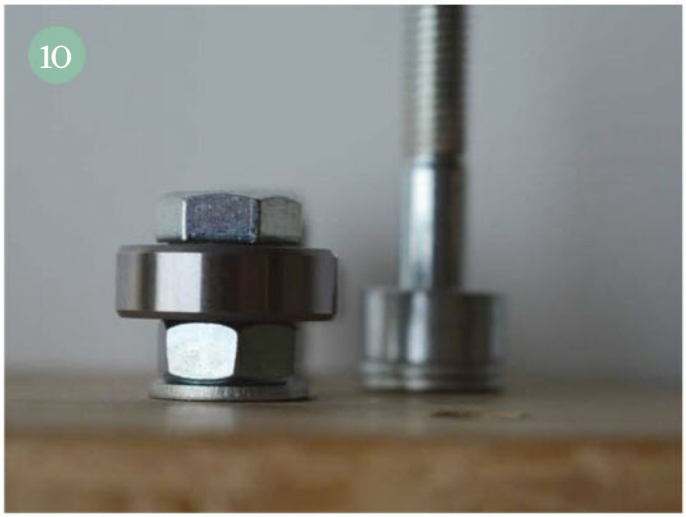
Put a washer onto the 7cm bolt, and once again feed it through >

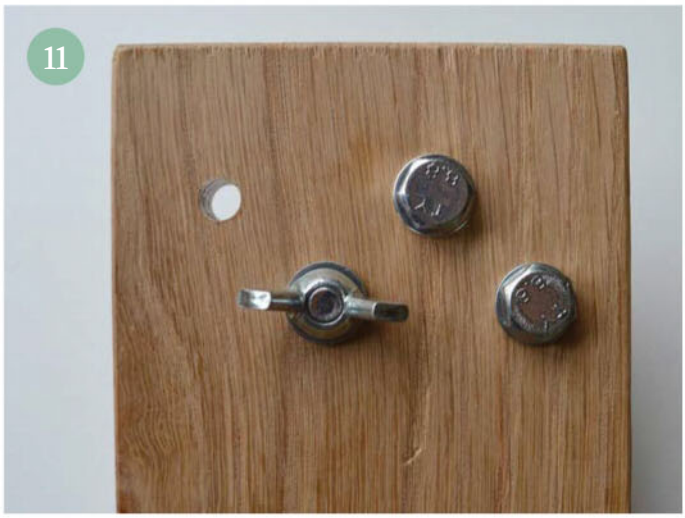
5 The sides of the figure-eight shaped hole will be filed smooth to allow the adjustable roller to move easily

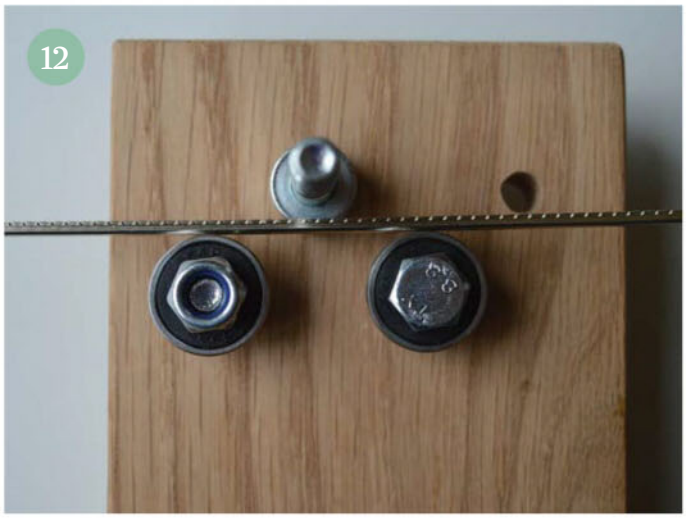
6 With the woodwork complete, it's time to fit the metal parts

7 These sealed ring bearings can be tightened into position, and the outer rim moves with very little friction

8 The first roller spins freely, but the bolt is tight and does not move







9 The first shaft collar is in position and tightened up. Two washers are used to ensure that the tang gap lines up with the centres of the rollers

10 The bolt for the adjustable roller is pushed through from the front, but the nut and washer ensure its distance from the board is identical to the first roller's

11 A wing nut is used for quick and easy adjustments

12 The fret tang just lips over the edge of the shaft collar. The second shaft collar can now be dropped on top and tightened up

from the back. This time, add two washers on the front, followed by a shaft collar. Hold everything together firmly and tighten up the grub screw in the collar to hold all the parts in place. The bolt should be able to turn fairly freely without excessive sideways movement 9.

For the adjustable roller bearing, you must put the bearing onto the second 4cm bolt then tighten a nut to hold it in position. Put a washer over the nut, then push the bolt through the slot from the front of the board 10. Put a washer over the section of the bolt that protrudes from the back and use a wing nut to hold it in position. If you've done everything correctly, you should be able to loosen the wing nut, slide the bolt in the slot to reposition the roller and re-tighten the wing nut to hold it 11.

Final set-up

Adjust the movable roller to its lowest position and insert a straight length of fret wire. The wire's tang should sit over the shaft collar, but the rounded section of the wire should sit outside the edge of the collar. If necessary, adjust the movable roller to hold the fret wire in position 12.

Drop a second shaft collar over the bolt and ensure it sits over the fret tang, but not the rounded part of the fret wire. The idea is that the gap between the two shaft collars should correspond with the width of the fret tang. This will guide the fret wire through the bending mechanism and prevent it from twisting 13 and 14.

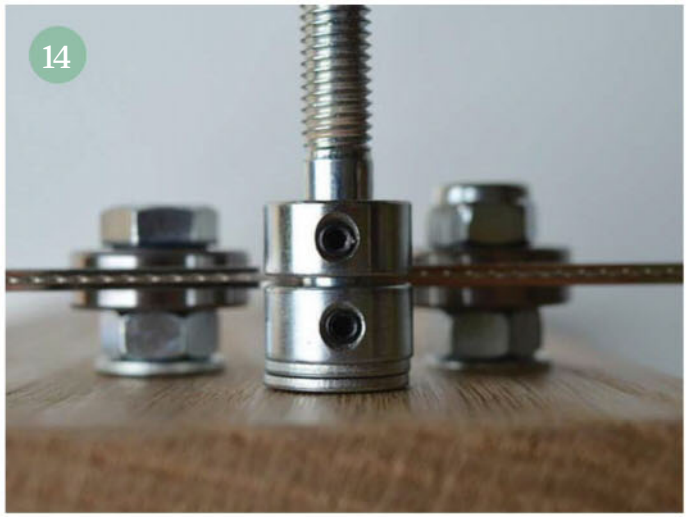
That's the fret bender part done. You can now adjust the movable roller to bend the wire to your preferred radius and get started. Remember, it's preferable to under-bend the wire then pass it through a second time to tighten the curve than to over-bend the wire.

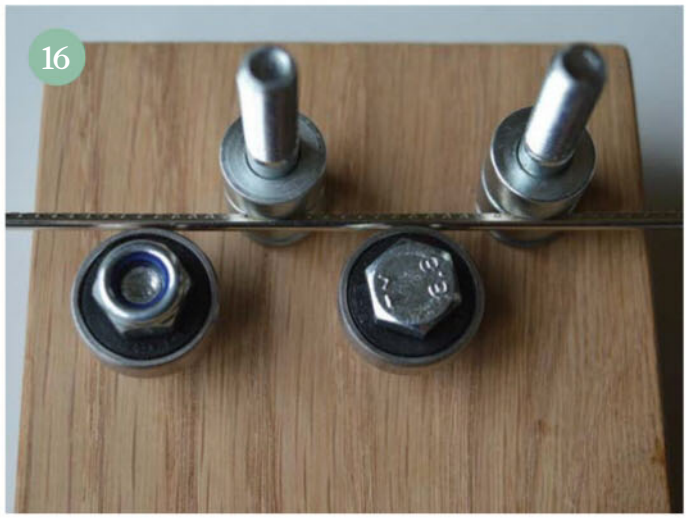
It's possible that you'll have to kink up the end of the fret wire very slightly in order to get things started 15. You may find that the fret wire pushes through smoothly, but if it's too stiff simply use a spanner or a wrench as a handle and it should pass through very easily. If you don't have a radius gauge, simply download one and print it off to check your progress.

The straightener

The straightener section requires another 7cm bolt, with one washer at the back and two washers at the front, plus two shaft collars 15. The procedure for setting the gap between the collars is the same as before. Feed the fret wire through after the first collar is positioned, and bring the second collar down on top before tightening it up 16.

Having a straightener isn't strictly necessary, but it can be used to correct over-bending mistakes. Fret wire isn't particularly cheap, so you could find that over time you'll





build up a collection of offcuts that you may wish to put to use on other fingerboards with flatter radii. The majority of the time, you'll be using the bender section – and you will need to remove the straightener to do so.

Verdict

Providing you have the correct tools, you should be able to knock one of these up in less than an hour. Accurately bent fret wire makes fretting a fingerboard so much easier, which means that you'll save time and achieve better results along the way.

When you first start doing fret work, it's probably unwise to experiment on your favourite guitar. Fortunately, there are plenty of necks on Ebay for less than £30, and I'd suggest practising on one of those to get a feel for the processes and skills involved.

I tend to use my bender tool clamped into a vice or a Workmate. Since very little force is required to turn the mechanism, it doesn't need too tight a grip.

Alternatively, you could bolt one of these to one end of a workbench. You may also choose to varnish or oil the wooden section of your bender tool to protect it. You could also cut off the extraneous threaded ends of the two 7.5cm bolts, but I left mine long because they can be used to turn the tang guides. Enjoy the project and always try to drill holes in the right places.

PARTS LIST & SUPPLIERS

- 2x 7cm M8 bolts with 5.5cm of non-threaded shaft
- 2x 4cm M8 bolts
- 9x M8 washers
- 1x M8 wing nut
- 2x M8 nuts
- 1x M8 nylon locking nut
- 2x sealed miniature steel ball bearings (Bearing Boys 608-2RS)
- 4x 8mm Shaft Collar (Bearing Boys CABU08Z)
- Hard wood block – ours measured 210x100x18mm

13 With the second shaft collar in situ, note how the fret tang sits in the gap between the two collars

14 This top view shows how the collar gap corresponds with the two bearing rollers. Everything must follow a straight path

15 Here's the first piece of fret wire being bent. It's best to send the wire through once, turn it around then send it through again. This ensures that the curve comes as close as possible to both ends of the wire

16 The straightener guide is in position, and once again the adjustable bearing is adjusted – but this time to reduce or eliminate the curve. Be careful because if you set the roller too high you will end up with a backwards curve

NEXT MONTH...

Huw once again tackles the upgrade or trade up debate. This time, it's the turn of a 2005 Epiphone Dot to enter the workshop, as he fits new pickups and tuners, gives it a rewire and carries out some much needed fret maintenance.

The Right Stripes?

Marshall's new Astoria series sees the company combine vintage and modern features in an attempt to take a slice out of the boutique market. **HUW PRICE** gives the Classic model a spin...

MARSHALL
MARSHALL

What actually constitutes a 'boutique amplifier' in this day and age? Hand wiring, top-quality components, strong visual appeal and superior tone all spring to mind. However, boutique amplifier manufacturing is no longer the preserve of individual craftsmen or small workshops.

Marshall identified a significant chunk of the high-end amplifier market that the company was missing out on; how galling it must be when so many boutique amp makers are brazenly marketing virtual clones of vintage Marshall products... The upshot is that the Astoria range is Marshall's assault on the boutique amp market.

All three Astoria models are available in combo and piggyback formats, and for this review we were supplied with both versions of the Astoria Classic. With a power rating of 30 watts, it's the simplest of the Astoria models.

The range's two-tone tolex gives the traditionally-shaped boxes a contemporary and stylish facelift, and the colour-matched 'plexi' name plates are based on the type that preceded Marshall's more familiar white plastic logos. Perhaps the even earlier metal Marshall badge might have been a classier touch for an amp of this status, but it's a minor detail and the silver piping with the brushed metal control panel is a sharp look.

Many boutique amp companies make a big deal of hand wiring and Marshall is doing the same for the Astorias. Hand wiring is usually associated with tag strip construction or the turret board approach employed in Marshall's Handwired Series. The Astorias have turrets mounted on printed circuit board and the reason given for this hybrid arrangement is that all of the signal path components are soldered to turrets, but it's more convenient to mount those relating to footswitching functionality directly to a PCB. Since there aren't any footswitching features on the Classic, Marshall's reasoning applies mostly to the Astoria series' Custom and Dual models.

Inside, the construction is exceptionally neat, and where appropriate connections between turrets are hard-wired together, rather than joined by PCB tracings. There's a mixture of Vishay and silver mica capacitors, while the resistors are metal film and wirewounds. The transformers are manufactured by Dagnall – Marshall's relationship with that company dates back to 1966.

Marshall's R&D department carried out A/B listening tests to determine the best power valves for the Astoria circuit and the KT66 won out, which makes the Astoria series rare among the company's product range. These examples have the old-style 'bottle' shape and nice brown bases, but Marshall doesn't disclose the name of the manufacturer.

The range's two-tone tolex gives the traditionally shaped boxes a contemporary and stylish facelift

Although more closely associated with EL84s and EL34s, Marshall has a long history with KT66s. They were the power valves used in the JTM45 combo that Eric Clapton played when he recorded the '*Beano*' album with John Mayall. Often described as the European equivalent of the 6L6, KT66s are known for deep lows and clarity, but they're less aggressive in the midrange than EL34s.

The KT66s are cathode-biased, so EL34s can be substituted without needing to visit a tech. In Marshall's early amplifiers, the KT66s were teamed up with a GZ34 valve rectifier, and the company has revived that classic combination for these Astoria models.

The Classic is single-channel and described as a low-gain amp. Its purpose isn't to be a crunch monster, or even to offer a range of clean-to-overdriven tones. Instead, Marshall designed the Classic as a clean platform for pedal users or those who simply prefer clean valve tones.

Some of the circuit description is interesting and that's reflected in the way the controls function. In place of gain, the Classic has a sensitivity control, which adjusts the amount of negative feedback in the preamp section. Negative feedback is used in the power amp section of vintage-style Marshall amps, and the presence control sets the amount. The Classic has no negative feedback loop in the power section and an 'edge' control replaces presence to adjust the overall brightness, which it achieves by cutting the high frequencies between the phase splitter and power valves.

Many of us will be familiar with the bass, middle and treble tone controls, and master sets the overall volume. Interestingly, you can turn the sensitivity to minimum and the Classic still passes signal, so it's nothing like a conventional gain and master volume arrangement. The master control doubles as a push/pull switch, which activates the power scaling and drops the output level down to five watts.

Cabinet configurations aside, the combo and head are identical in

Featuring Vishay signal capacitors and metal film resistors, the Classic is very neatly constructed

Pull the master pot to drop the output from 30 to 5 watts

Edge adjusts the upper frequency response, but it's purely an equalisation control

every way. As you might expect, the cabs are made robustly from plywood and the combo just about qualifies as a one-arm lift using its faux-leather handle.

Each version is equipped with a 12-inch Celestion Creamback speaker which, of late, has become a very popular choice for boutique amps. The chassis of both amps are identical but orientated differently, due to their physical configuration, with the valves pointed upright in the head and towards the front of the combo's cabinet.

From a maintenance perspective, the head arrangement is preferable because you can identify dodgy valves and replace them without needing to pull out the entire chassis. But from a player's point of view, it's easier to access the controls on the combo.

In use

I'll deal with the relatively minor differences between the two Classic formats later on, but to keep things simple for now, all observations about the way the amps function apply equally to both.

Upon flicking the standby switches, the first surprise was the Classic's quietness. Until I plugged in a guitar, I was a bit concerned that neither amp was working, but whoever laid out this circuit obviously knows a thing or two about grounding and lead orientation.

Due to the unconventional controls, some experimentation is needed to become familiar with the way the Classic operates. >

The inside story

We caught up with Mike Cahill, Marshall's marketing and new product liaison guy, to get the full skinny on the new Astoria series...

So what's all this talk about the Astorias being boutique amplifiers?

"There are several reasons we wanted to introduce a premium product, but we can't possibly produce a boutique amp, as such. We're too big a company to be boutique, but it's most definitely aimed at the guitarist at that end of the market.

"We didn't want to produce a product, as we usually do, with essentially the same preamp but a different power stage. We wanted to make something more special and go into areas where we haven't ventured before, in order to get away from some of the criticism we've had – for a long time – about all Marshalls 'looking the same'."

Well, Marshall has such a strong brand identity...

"Absolutely, and that's still there with the Astoria but we've put a twist on it with the looks, the colour schemes and the actual cabinet designs, to make it striking.

"Another criticism we get is about doing the reissue thing. A lot of people like that and we're certainly not going to stop celebrating our tremendous history and heritage, but there's no reason why, alongside that, we can't do something a little different.

"We wanted to keep that vintage sensibility but give the Astorias a more up-to-date and versatile twist with some of the switching features. Tick box number one was that it had to sound great, and we certainly think we've

"A criticism we get is about doing reissues. A lot of people like that and we're certainly not going to stop celebrating our heritage, but there's no reason why, alongside that, we can't do something a little different..."

achieved that with all three models, for slightly different reasons. With the Classic, having negative feedback in the preamp stage rather than the power amp stage allows a little more linearity, and therefore more volume with a bit less gain. I think it's fair to say that generally having no negative feedback in the power amp creates a more sought-after sound, with that bell-like harmonic distortion."

Many of the points you make about versatility and switching don't really apply to the Classic...

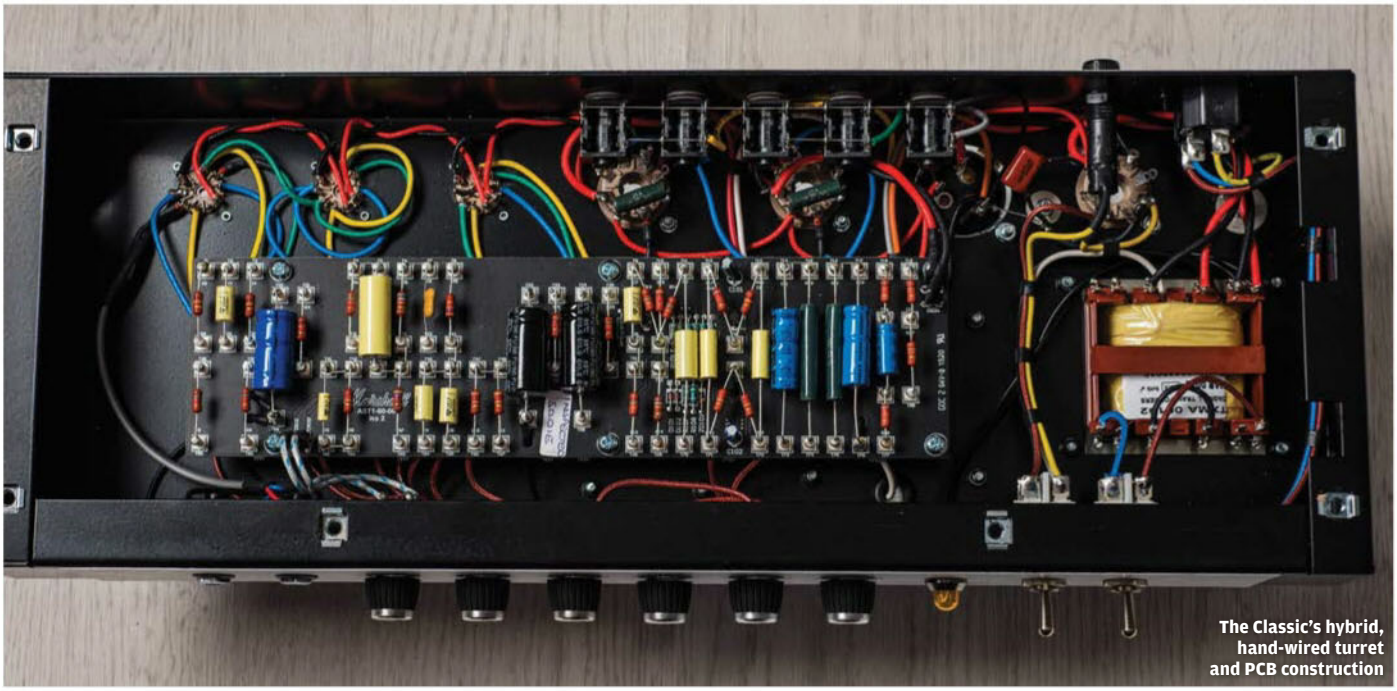
"That's a fair point. It applies more to the Custom and especially the Dual. The Classic is very much pointed at guitarists who like their pedal setups and want that pure valve sound from their amps.

"The Custom has a gain control with body and 20dB boost switches. The Dual has all those features but with two channels, and both the Custom and Dual have valve-driven effects loops, but they can't match the Classic for clean headroom."

Many of the comparable, US-made boutique amps are actually cheaper than the Astorias are, here in the UK...

"We're absolutely aware of where they're sitting in the market, and the boutique market is pretty crowded. We're under no illusions about the niche nature of the Classic, in particular.

"But there's still plenty of brand loyalty – particularly in the US, where the Marshall brand is still as strong as it's ever been – and a lot of people are incredibly excited about something new, and not a reissue, that's absolutely a Marshall."



The Classic's hybrid, hand-wired turret and PCB construction

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Classic AST1H head & AST-122 cabinet

The **Dr. Z Route 66** head **£1,499** and **Tube Tone Engineering Redneck 30** head **£679** both produce 32 watts and combine an EF86 with KT66s. **Fargan**'s **Retro Classic** head **£1,499** runs on KT66s, and a three-way switch provides a choice of tweed 'Bassman', 'Bluesbreaker' and 'Superbass' tone options.

Classic AST1C combo

Also handwired in the UK, the **Gartone Regal 45 £1,995** is a Bluesbreaker-inspired valve rectified combo with KT66s, Mercury Magnetics transformers and Tayden Alnico speakers. **Fender**'s **Hot Rod Deville ML 212 £849** is another pedal platform combo, but offers twice the power and has onboard reverb and an effects loop.

It certainly delivers big and fairly loud clean tones, with an undeniable Marshall flavour, but the amp only really comes to life when the master and sensitivity are turned up fairly high.

With both controls at or near maximum, the Classic does overdrive, but most – if not all – of that overdrive comes from the power amp section rather than the pre. Turning up the sensitivity control increases level, but it also appears to introduce more harmonic overtones. With passive single-coil and humbucker pickups, the sensitivity control's useful range is halfway and above. Below that, the Classic can sound a little flat.

Anyone who's used Marshall-style amps will feel right at home with the equalisation section – there are huge amounts of bass available and ample midrange swing. The treble can take you from dark and super-smooth tones to crystalline glassiness, and the edge control seems to add a layer of sparkle on top. To dial in the sweet spot for your guitar, all you need to do is use your ears.

The 'power reduction' feature works extremely well. Switching between power levels – 30 and 5 watts – the changes are gradual rather than instantaneous. Best of all, you don't need to switch to standby to make the change. There's no tonal degradation whatsoever and the uneven decay you occasionally encounter with power scaling is entirely absent.

The Classic is essentially about clean and moderately overdriven Marshall tones, rather than metal mayhem...

The power drop is less noticeable when the Classic is turned right up, and it's more or less on a par with swapping from the hi input to the lo, which is 6dB less sensitive. However, without the power reduction engaged, swapping to the lo input creates the impression of bass roll-off and slightly sweeter top end. It's certainly not one of those 'try it once and never again' low-level inputs.

With single coils, a cranked up Classic will do that glorious Marshall trick of layering complex and chimey upper harmonics over fat and roaring low mids. It's almost as if the lower registers are more overdriven and compressed than the highs. You can veer closer to distortion with humbuckers but, exactly as described, this is essentially about clean and moderately overdriven Marshall tones, rather than metal mayhem.

The Classic differs from the archetypal Marshall formula in its dynamic response. This could be due to the absence of negative feedback in the power section, and maybe also down to the presence of a valve rectifier in the circuit, but the Classic's softer and more forgiving quality responds beautifully to playing dynamics.

More traditional Marshalls sometimes feel a bit stiff and the fast transient response can go beyond punchiness and into spikiness. The Classic's looser character may not please everybody, but anybody with tweedy tendencies will certainly like it.

Plugging straight in without pedals demonstrates that the Classic is a highly playable and enjoyable amp, but it's all about variations on a theme.

The speaker is a specially voiced Celestion Creamback

Cathode biasing allows you to straight swap EL34s for the KT66s

It's more than a one-trick pony, but only just. So, then, how does it perform as a pedal platform?

In a word, it's excellent. I tried the Classic with a wide selection of overdrives, clean boosts and fuzz pedals and they made it come to life. Pedals gel seamlessly with the core amp tone, and providing the Classic with a bit more kick up the front end makes it even more dynamic and responsive. The lo input is worth trying with boosts and overdrives because you'll hear more of the pedal's tone, and most stompboxes of that sort can easily compensate for the 6dB drop.

The sonic differences between the two Classic models become more apparent when they're pushed hard. With all the controls set identically, our combo had a touch more gain with beefier mids, looser lows and less treble. Vox fans will certainly approve. In contrast, the head and cab arrangement sounded clearer, tighter and brighter.

These qualities make the head and cab the best choice as a pedal platform, but the combo might be preferred for its chewier and grungier plug-in-and-play attributes. Personally, I liked both, but I feel that the head and cab version would be the most versatile option.

It's perhaps ironic when you consider that Marshall always made 'boutique' amps back in the day, and for several years the Handwired Series has been ticking all of the boutique boxes that actually matter. So why isn't Marshall regarded as a boutique amplifier company?

Most guitarists have fairly clear expectations of Marshall amps – both sonically and visually. In contrast, the company's boutique competitors, such as Dr. Z, Tone King and Carr, aren't constrained by such a strong brand identity.

Consequently, Marshall must have walked a bit of a tightrope when developing the Astoria series. To be genuinely successful, the Astoria amps must attract customers who hitherto might not have considered a Marshal amp, but at the same time, care has to be taken not to alienate loyal customers.

Creating a vintage-inspired modern 'boutique' amp with such a strongly Marshall-esque sonic character has freed the company to combine much-loved heritage elements with modern features that purists would find intolerable in a reissue. However, it must be said that these features are far more in evidence on the Custom and Dual models than the Classic.

And that's the main issue some may have with the Astoria Classic. Designing a clean valve amp as a platform for pedals isn't exactly breaking new ground. Fender had that one nailed by the end of the 1960s – and so did Marshall.

One minor thing to note is that, since the Classic is intended for players who use effects, it seems odd that it's the only model in the Astoria range without an effects loop.

The Classic produces really fine tones, especially when its front end is being pushed. However, the Custom and Dual models reach places that the Classic can only hint at when it isn't assisted by pedals. The Classic's relative simplicity may appeal, but if you need the flexibility offered by their additional features and the wider range of tones on offer, try out the Custom and Dual before making up your mind.

KEY FEATURES

Classic AST1C combo

- **PRICE** £2,099
- **DESCRIPTION** Cathode-biased, 30W/5W, one-channel combo with power scaling, multiple speaker outputs, specially-voiced Celestion G12H Creamback 12" speaker. Made in the UK
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 2x KT66, 1x GZ34
- **CONTROLS** sensitivity, bass, middle, treble, master (with power reduction push/pull)
- **DIMENSIONS** 51x25.5x60cm
- **WEIGHT** 27.3Kg/60.1lbs
- **CONTACT** Marshall Amplification plc 01908 375411

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Refreshing redesign
+ Dynamically responsive
+ Plenty of clean headroom
+ Very low noise floor
+ Vox-like chewy mids

– Limited gain range
– Not as clear or tight as the head and cab
– No effects loop

Marshall sparkle and bite, combined with Vox-like midrange and tweedy touch response, but look elsewhere for high-gain crunch

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Classic AST1H head & AST-122 cabinet

- **PRICE** £1,799 (head), £519 (cabinet)
- **DESCRIPTION** Cathode-biased, 30W/5W, one-channel head with power scaling, multiple speaker outputs. Open-back cab with specially-voiced Celestion G12H Creamback 12" speaker. Made in the UK
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 2x KT66, 1x GZ34
- **CONTROLS** sensitivity, bass, middle, treble, master (with power reduction push/pull)
- **DIMENSIONS** 26.5x23x60cm (head), 51x25.5x60cm (cabinet)
- **WEIGHT** 15.8Kg/34.8lbs (head), 17.1Kg/37.6lbs (cabinet)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Refreshing redesign
+ Dynamically responsive
+ Plenty of clean headroom
+ Very low noise floor
+ Tighter Marshall-esque lows

– Limited gain range
– Mids not as thick and chewy as the combo
– No effects loop

Much like its combo cousin, but the head and cabinet performs even better as a pedal platform, thanks to its extra clarity and low-end tightness

8/10

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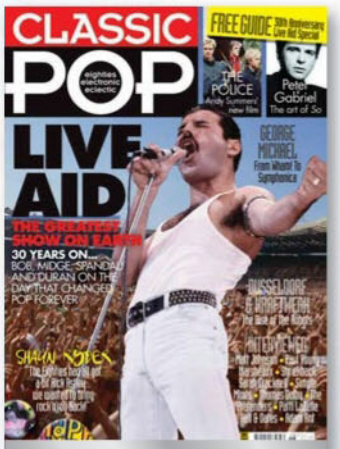

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Norman Encore B20 & Protege B18

Two hand-made Canadian dreadnoughts offering solid tops and varied tones at an attractive price. **SIMON BRADLEY** checks them out

Many familiar brands have their roots in the unassuming, rural Canadian town of La Patrie, 200 kilometres to the south of Quebec City. Instruments bearing the names of Godin, Simon & Patrick, Art & Lutherie and Seagull have benefitted from both the technical skills of their founder, Robert Godin, and the amount of quality tonewood which is close at hand in that part of the world, and we'd suggest that the profile of all these marques should be higher.

Norman Guitars is another name which peeks out from beneath the Godin umbrella and, since its inception in 1972, has also continued production in La Patrie, thus earning itself the moniker of 'Canada's guitar'.

Here are two exceedingly woody members of the current catalogue: the B20, the first design Norman produced back in the early 1970s, and the B18. There are a number of construction features common not only to both acoustics featured here but also across the entire Norman range, and the idea is to produce great-sounding guitars that wear their 'heartwood' unashamedly on their sleeves.

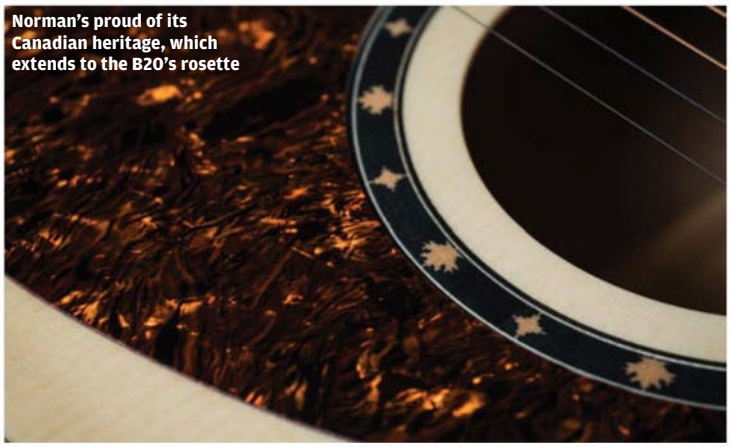
The B20 comes from the Encore Series and is also available with a cutaway, in a 12-string configuration and as a mini-jumbo. It features a solid spruce top, which undergoes a procedure called 'select pressure testing', developed by Robert Godin to check the quality of the piece of wood used for each acoustic. Each sample of spruce is measured for its strength and is used only should it meet certain criteria. In turn, this allows Norman to use grades of wood below that of the rarified 'AAA' rating without majorly compromising either performance or tone. It also helps to keep Norman's range competitively priced.

Another feature common to all Normans – and Simon & Patrick and Seagull guitars too, come to that – is the custom-polished finish. Designed specifically to ensure that the body vibration isn't restricted in any way, it's so thin that you can still feel the grain of the spruce as you run your fingers over it. Norman also suggests that it'll aid the 'ageing' of the guitar over time. Fair enough, but we can't imagine that it would protect the guitar from dings and bumps as efficiently as a thicker, more intrusive coating of polyester. That said, we're happy to live with anything which allows the wood to breathe and consequently sound good.

The lightly stained, three-piece neck of silver leaf maple is affixed to the body using a glueless technique called 'precision neck attachment', which allows the meeting of the woods to be as intimate – and thus as tonesome – as is possible.

The idea is to produce great-sounding guitars, which wear their 'heartwood' unashamedly on their sleeves...

The other materials employed include a three-way lamination of locally sourced wild cherry for the back and sides, and Indian rosewood for the fingerboard and bridge. Even the rosette is composed of actual wood. >



Norman's proud of its Canadian heritage, which extends to the B20's rosette

KEY FEATURES

Norman Encore B20

- **PRICE** £459 with soft, padded gigbag
- **DESCRIPTION** Dreadnought-sized acoustic, hand-made in Canada
- **BUILD** Solid spruce top with laminated wild cherry back and sides, silver leaf maple neck and Indian rosewood fingerboard with dot inlays and 21 frets. Also includes Graph Tech Tusq nut and saddle, Indian rosewood bridge, single rear strap pin and 14:1 sealed chrome tuners
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631mm/24.84"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.5mm at first fret, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at seventh fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **FINISHES** Semi Gloss Natural (as reviewed), Black
- **WEIGHT** 2.22kg/4.9lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (£499 with this spec)
- **ACTION AS SUPPLIED** 12th-fret treble 3.5mm, 12th-fret bass 4mm
- **CONTACT** www.normanguitars.com

KEY FEATURES

Norman Protege B18

- **PRICE** £499 with soft, padded gigbag
- **DESCRIPTION** Dreadnought-sized electro-acoustic, hand-made in Canada
- **BUILD** Solid cedar top with laminated wild cherry back and sides, silver leaf maple neck and Indian rosewood fingerboard with dot inlays and 21 frets. Also includes Graph Tech Tusq nut and saddle, Indian rosewood bridge, single rear strap pin and 14:1 sealed chrome tuners. Electronics comprise the Fishman PreSys preamp and under-saddle Sonicore pickup
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631mm/24.84"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.5mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at seventh fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36.5mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **FINISH** Semi Gloss Natural (as reviewed), Burgundy, Black, Brown and Tobacco Burst
- **WEIGHT** 2.36kg/5.2lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (£549 with this spec)
- **ACTION AS SUPPLIED** 12th-fret treble 3.5mm, 12th-fret bass 4mm
- **CONTACT** www.normanguitars.com

We're impressed by the B20, which comes fitted with a Tusq nut and saddle. It's invitingly woody and simply demands to be played. The main difference between the B20 and the B18 is the choice of material for the solid top: cedar. What's more, the B18 is offered in a number of colours, including Burgundy, Tobacco and Black, in addition to the Natural Satin of our example.

Our test B18 also includes the optional Fishman Presys system, which marries a straightforward and uncluttered preamp with an undersaddle Sonicore pickup. The controls comprise a three-way EQ, a volume pot and phase button plus a tuner. There are more sophisticated preamps out there, but the Presys is perfectly suited to the guitars that Norman produces – we feel that the features provided by such systems as the F1 Aura would be out of place.

All other features are as with the B20, although we should point out that the neck of the B18 has a tad more meat to it. As all Normans are hand-finished, we're satisfied that this most likely explains any small differences. Both are ideally set up, play well and, as they're strung out of the box with 12-53 phosphor bronze strings, they can also arm wrestle with the best of them.

Both guitars are very tidy inside, with no rough edges that we could spot. The B18 has a decorative leaf affixed to the internal heel area, which is a nice touch.

In use

As we'd expected, the B20 offers a little more treble than the B18, and both have a pleasant, woody tone. The latter is especially suited to fingerstyle due to its more mellow performance, although it does lack something in the volume

As with the B20, even the B18's rosette is made from wood

stakes when compared to the B20. Of course, this can be counteracted by plugging in, and the Fishman Presys system does the job as well as ever, with the phase switch adding in a touch more bass when you need it.

Both come into their own when strumming, as the additional attack really allows the woods to speak. The laminated bodies can't help but restrict the level of bass response when compared to all-solid guitars and the balance can be a little off-kilter. For example, the B20's treble output can all but obliterate the low mids and bass end when hit enthusiastically and the string separation can get a little indistinct.

One niggle is that each guitar only sports one strap pin. So should you wish to play while standing you'll either need to tie a strap to the headstock with a shoelace, like granny did, or undertake the nail-biting process of drilling into the heel to affix another pin.

Overall, these are beautifully constructed guitars, which bring the quiet majesty of the Canadian forest to your home or rehearsal space.

The tonal performances were fine, although neither blew us away, and if your style of playing errs towards the more violent end of the spectrum, then either of them is more than resilient enough to stand up to your flailings. Make sure that you check one out in the flesh to see just how nice they are.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

Norman B20

+ Looks great
+ Lovely woods
+ Ideal for hefty strumming

– Overpowering treble on occasion
– Sometimes tonally indistinct

Although we have no complaints regarding the construction, the trebly tone will take some getting used to. That said, it's a gorgeous guitar

6/10

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

Norman B18

+ Nice, mellow tone
+ Good electro performance
+ Satisfyingly meaty neck

– Just the single strap pin
– Can get lost in a mix

Cedar-topped acoustics have their own merits and this is worth a closer look. It may be a little too subtle for some, but we liked it

7/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Tanglewood TW115SSCE** £429 cutaway electro has a solid Sitka spruce top with laminated mahogany body and the B-Band Crescent soundhole preamp. **Yamaha's AC1** £524 offers a solid Sitka spruce top, rosewood or mahogany body and the System 66 and SRT pickup array. Meanwhile, the **Martin Dreadnought Junior**or **000X1AE**, both £599, would be the perfect introduction to the electro-acoustic wonders of that great maker.

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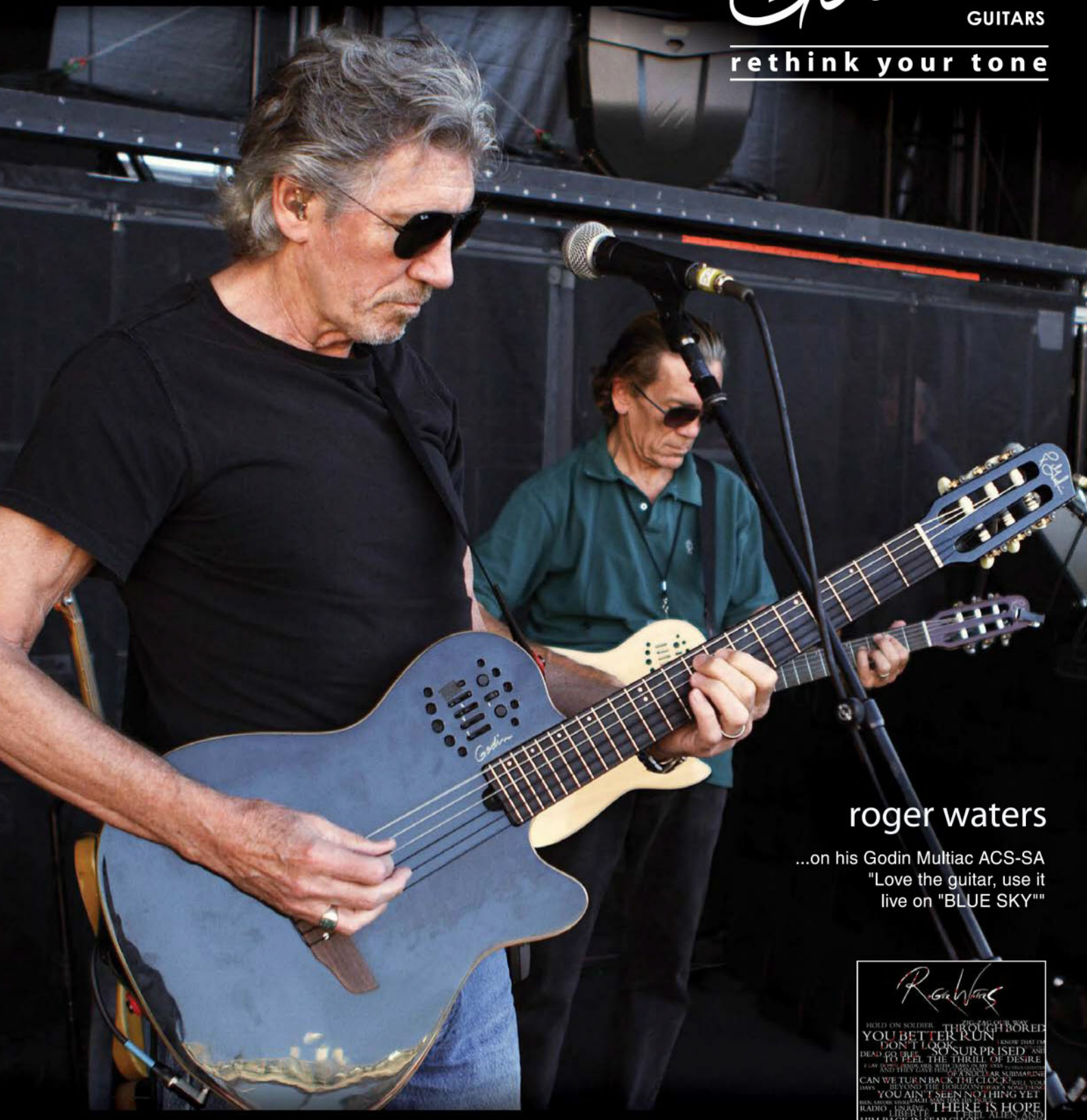

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TYYSTER PELTI £2,530
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Tyyster Pelti

With its sheet metal body and internal pickup, the Tyyster Pelti is more than a retro-modernist fancy. **HUW PRICE** goes (mint) green

Maybe it's something to do with the persistent cold, or the long winter months with little or no sunlight, but playing the blues has been a popular pastime throughout Scandinavia for decades. Finnish luthier Ville Tyyster's passion is electric and acoustic blues and he's always been drawn to resonator guitars, in addition to the usual electrics.

Ville's dream was to design an electric guitar with a resonator tone, but his early attempts produced mixed results, which saw feedback problems limiting his efforts. After a 'creative pause', Ville revisited the concept, decided to dispense with the resonator cone and instead to use a sheet metal body, which would transfer its tonal characteristics to the guitar's pickups.

Peeking inside the Tyyster Pelti reveals a fully hollow body with two stiffeners spot-welded across the top. The neck and pickups are attached to a longitudinal beam that's fixed to the body at both ends. The upshot of this arrangement is that the front and back of the body are free-floating.

Painting a bolt-on neck to match the body is certainly a road less travelled, but colouring the fingerboard is even more unusual. Even so, it looks superb and the fretwork is top-drawer. The only downside of the painted neck is 'disappearing' dots. The side dots are quite hard to see and I found myself struggling under normal lighting conditions, especially when playing slide. Before I even mentioned this to Ville, he told me that he'd be using black dots in future, which should fix the issue.

The humbucking pickups are also unusual because they have two individual coils, which are offset to span three strings each. The pups' specs include AWG 43 wire and ceramic magnets, but customers can request Alnico for a mellower tone.

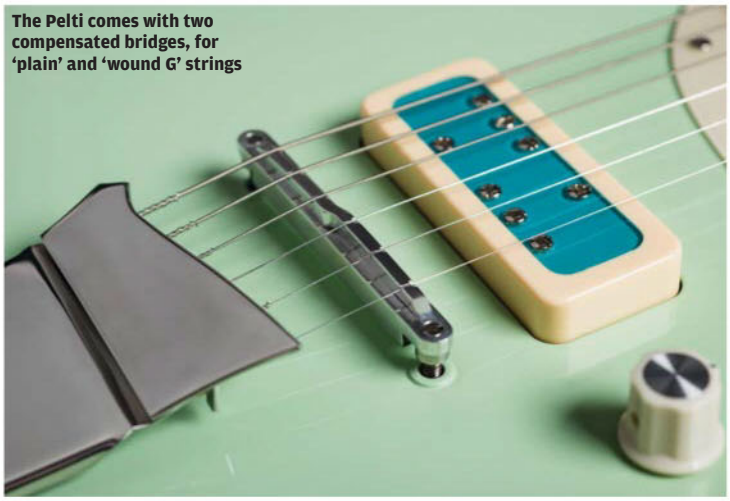
Pelti is actually a Finnish word for sheet metal, and in this case it's steel because the internal pickup requires a ferromagnetic material. Specially made for the Pelti, it's a very narrow humbucker located in the space between the rear pickup and the bridge itself.

Finnish luthier Ville Tyyster's dream was to design an electric guitar with resonator tone...

Fitted in close proximity to the top, the internal pickup works by sensing vibrations. With conventional pickups, string vibration disturbs the magnetic field. However, the Pelti's vibrating top performs that function with the internal pickup instead. That's why non-ferromagnetic metals, such as brass, simply wouldn't work.

The open-gear Schaller tuners add to the retro vibe, but more importantly they're smooth and accurate, which is vital for a guitar that's designed to be played in multiple tunings.

Two of the three control knobs operate the external pickups. You get volume and tone, with the former doubling up as a push/pull >


The Pelti comes with two compensated bridges, for 'plain' and 'wound G' strings

KEY FEATURES

Tyyster Pelti

- **PRICE** £2,530
- **DESCRIPTION** Metal electric guitar, manufactured in Finland
- **BUILD** Hollow sheet steel body, bolt-on maple neck with 'C' profile and 9.5" radius fingerboard, bone nut and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Custom tailpiece, 7075 aluminium bar bridge, open-gear Schaller tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Tyyster-manufactured split-coil humbucking pickups with volume, tone, push/pull phase switch and three-way selector switch, plus internal humbucking magnetic pickup with volume control and push/pull activation switch. Split stereo output jack
- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.3kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes, €500 extra
- **FINISHES** Polyester – any colour you want
- **CONTACT** Tyyster Guitars **www.tyysterguitars.com**

Retro, open-gear Schaller tuners add to the vibe

Ville's finishing is impeccable

The Pelti comes with a stereo cable and a splitter box

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

James Trussart Guitars has been the most high-profile maker of metal electrics in recent years and the **Deluxe SteelCaster £3,199** is a T-type with a maple neck and Micawber pickup arrangement. Alternatively, check out a **Tribe Metal Hollow Body TL £1,174** or track down a second-hand **Tokai Talbo** for around **£750**.

phase switch. The third knob pulls up to route the internal pickup to the main output and also adjusts its volume.

The Pelti is supplied with two intonation-compensated bar bridges, for 'plain' and 'wound G' string sets. The post spacing can also accommodate a tune-o-matic bridge, which may intonate more accurately, but the extra weight could hamper the Pelti's tone.

In use

Since the Pelti is designed for bottleneck just as much as regular playing, it arrived fitted with a set of 11s. For hardcore slide playing, heavier strings are recommended, but I found this 'in between' gauge quite workable. The neck has a reasonably slim 'C' profile, which retains a fairly constant depth along its length and the action, as supplied, was medium-low.

Just like tonewoods, many metals seem to have their own sound. Had the body been brass, I might have expected a brighter, quicker and more harmonically complex tone. Instead, the steel has a warmer, smoother and more compressed response – but there's still a discernibly 'metallic', boxy clang. The best overall description would be sweet and mellow brashness...

The Pelti's acoustic tone is lively and responsive. It's fairly loud, too, but there's less sustain than I'd expect from a wooden semi-solid or a conventional acoustic.

Sadly, the internal pickup isn't an unqualified success. The output level is fairly low, so it requires a low-noise/high-gain preamp. The directly injected tone is very interesting – it's almost as if a miniature dynamic microphone had been installed inside the body.

This is something that could certainly be used in a recording context – on its own or in conjunction with the amplified sound. However, I found the pickup so susceptible to feedback that it couldn't be used, even with low-power guitar amps.

The Pelti is supplied with a stereo cable and a splitter box, but when I tried running the signals through two separate amps I encountered ground loop issues. The wiring scheme also prevents you from blending in some of the internal signal with the external pickups, to lend the overall tone a tad more 'acoustic' quality.

Having dealt with the Pelti's drawbacks, there's a great deal to recommend it. The external pickups produce exceptional results, offering brightness, clarity and touch sensitivity. Through a clean amp, they offer excellent definition, with the Pelti's natural acoustic qualities very much a part of the sonic mix.

There's a touch of Firebird-style humbucker about them, coupled with a vintage P-90 midrange snarl, a solid bass thump and a dusting of chime over the top. All three settings are distinct and the tone control's gradual roll-off adds plenty of sonic shading.

I particularly liked the out-of-phase tone for its hollowed-out, nasal honk, which sounds not unlike an old blues 78. For slide work, clean arpeggios and fingerstyle playing, it's an inspiring sound and, helpfully, rolling back the treble fattens up the tone rather than dulling it down.

The atmospheric and surprisingly ethereal clean tones take on a meaner bite as you move into overdrive, and the touch response encourages you to dig into the strings with your fingers and work the amp. Feedback comes on quite quickly, so large, loud amps probably aren't an ideal match. The Pelti works particularly well with medium-powered valve combos.

Ville Tyyster certainly deserves credit for his efforts to create something original and 'lo-tech', but the internal pickup doesn't entirely convince. However, in every other regard, the Pelti really does. It juxtaposes pawnshop chic with excellent build quality, distinctive looks and unique tone.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Wonderful sound
+ Excellent build quality and finish
+ Distinctive and stylish looks
+ Easy playability

– Low output of internal pickup
– Prone to feedback

A very fine-quality instrument made from unconventional materials and with bespoke pickups, which both contribute to its unique and distinctive tone

8/10

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Hold the 'phones

The Epiphone name has become synonymous with high-quality, affordable sunburst electro-acoustics, and this trio maintain the trend while adding the revolutionary Min-ETune system. **RICK BATEY** takes a look

Epiphone's long history is full of great-looking sunburst flat-top guitars, from the underrated Madrid and FT series instruments of the 1930s through to the Gibson-owned era and the classic Texans and gorgeous Frontiers of the 1960s. If you love sunbursts, the current catalogue has plenty to choose from, and this month we have three of them under the microscope – all electro-acoustics, but each with a very different role to play.

FT-350SCE

The big news with the FT-350SCE is easy to summarise: this is, Epiphone says, the world's first affordable self-tuning electro-acoustic guitar, as it comes with the Tronical Min-ETune mechanical machinehead system, which offers both standard and dropped tunings. Before we get on to that, the FT-350 is a big, bold, cutaway dreadnought that comes in a choice of four colours: Black, Wine Red, Natural and this one, a bright Violin Sunburst. The body is white-bound, there's a super-wide 10-ply band of purfling around the top and more glitz courtesy of a Gibson Hummingbird-shaped scratchplate. With its extra cutaway notch, the guard adds a hint of a Grammer – the kind of guitar a country star might have played in the 60s at the Grand Ole Opry. >

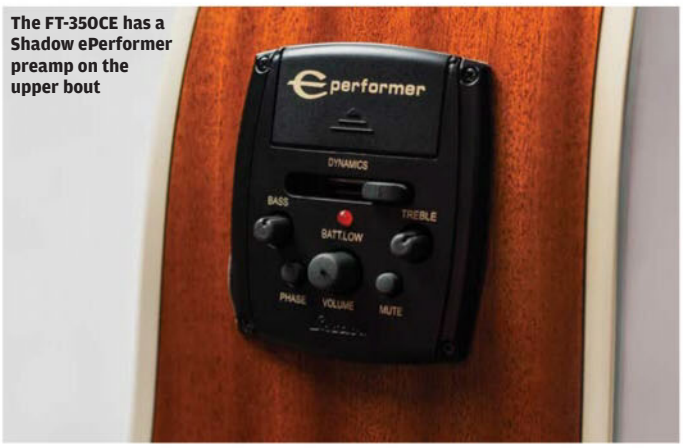
Epiphone
Epiphone

Epiphone FT-350SCE, AJ-45ME/VSS & EL-00 Pro

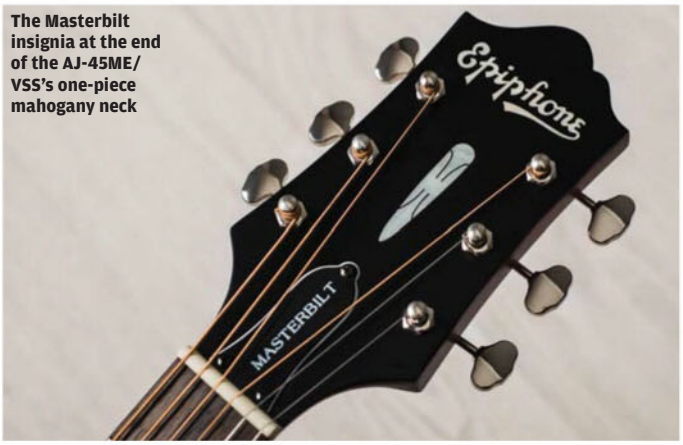
The FT-350CE's back and sides are laminated mahogany, streaky and sapele-like; the top is solid Sitka spruce, clean and fine-grained on this example, although with a strong two-tone contrast between the top and bottom halves, depending how the light hits it (chatoyancy, as it's known). It's a natural side-effect of the way a piece of wood is cut, and nothing to worry about.

The neck is made from three pieces of maple, with a cool-looking dart volute reinforcing the area behind the nut. The scale length is a full 25.5 inches and the white-bound rosewood fingerboard carries dot markers, with one at the first fret – which is unusual.

We've got a 60s-style headstock, and the nut is a Tronical Speednut made of a self-lubricating material. The slim, rounded neck is quite speedy and feels very much like a mid/late 60s Epiphone acoustic neck. The action on ours is medium, with room to come down, and the cutaway is a boon for playing above the 12th fret.



The FT-350CE has a Shadow ePerformer preamp on the upper bout



The Masterbilt insignia at the end of the AJ-45ME/VSS's one-piece mahogany neck

The Min-ETune does what it says on the tin. It's lightweight, unobtrusive and easy to use in the simplest mode

Acoustically, the FT-350SCE is both plenty loud and bright in tone. It's a cheerful and responsive guitar to play and although the bottom E is possibly a touch shy, it's got a nice, forward, articulate midrange that's good for picking notes out of chords.

This guitar comes fitted with a Shadow NanoFlex undersaddle pickup, with a Shadow ePerformer preamp located on the upper bout. This offers volume, bass and treble rotaries, phase and mute buttons (the latter will come into play a lot when using the Min-ETune), and a 'dynamics' slider that seems to operate as a fairly subtle midrange body control. The B and G strings are a touch prominent, but overall it's a good-sounding example of the undersaddle breed. And so to the FT-350SCE's main selling point, the Tronical Min-ETune. This has been around on Epiphone electrics for a couple of years now, and it's fair to say that acclaim has been widespread but not universal. Some players are worried about battery life, or may be concerned about the possibility – however remote – that the electronics may fail and cause a publicly embarrassing moment. Equally, some may feel they can perform tuning duties more quickly by ear, or more accurately with a really good stage tuner.

Those are fair points, but these systems are here to stay and the Min-ETune does what it says on the tin: it's lightweight and unobtrusive. It's easy to use in the simplest mode: just switch on, strum all the strings with your thumb over the end of the fingerboard, wait a couple of seconds and strum again, and if any indicator lights are still red, play that string alone for a final auto-adjustment.

A Gameboy-style four-way controller lets you access three menu banks containing assorted common altered tunings (you can also add your own). You can go into a calibration mode or choose the level

of accuracy you desire; the closer it is, the longer tuning may take, but +/- 2 cents seems good enough for live use. You can tune manually if needed, but be aware that the ratchety-feeling 40:1 ratio gears are slow, and the bass-side tuners work in the opposite way to the conventional method.

The makers claim that the rechargeable li-polymer battery gives 80-100 tunes. The fastest big retune we achieved was about 10 seconds, from DADGAD back to standard; the slowest was around 50 seconds, from standard to a very dropped tuning situated a few steps away on a different bank. Do download Tronical's instruction PDF and work through it before you run out of stage, because it's possible to make a boo-boo unless you understand how it works.

Whether this is something you need is a very personal decision. The best thing is to try one in a store, taking special care to go through the menu, replicating what you'll be doing with it – whether swapping between dropped tunings or simple standard tuning tweaks – and see how it rocks your boat.

AJ-45ME/VSS

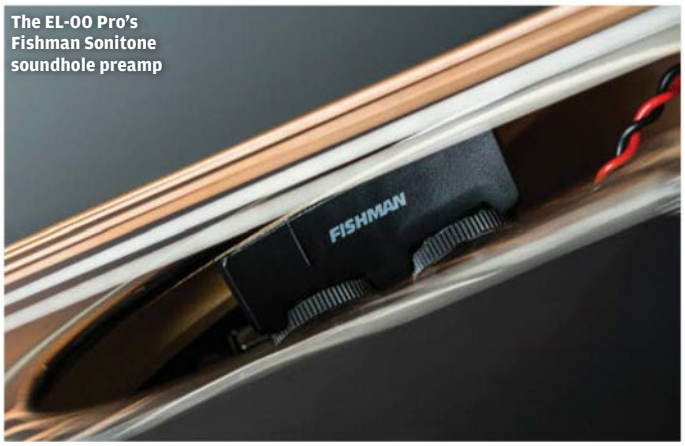
The slope-shouldered dreadnought was introduced by Gibson in the 30s and adopted by Epiphone under the Gibson umbrella in the late 50s, and for many there's a special character to this kind of guitar that can't be found anywhere else.

The Epiphone AJ-45ME comes with a 'Masterbilt' appendage, referring back to the company's pre-Gibson glory days, and it seems to take inspiration from various eras. The company's use of the term 'AJ' is confusing; 'Advanced Jumbo' to us means Gibson, the 30s and rosewood back and sides with a long scale length, but Epi literature prescribes it to this guitar and the Inspired by 1964 Texan, which are both mahogany, with 24.75-inch scales.

The headstock is authentically 1930s, with an asymmetrical humped shape, a nostalgic pearly 'stickpin' emblem and a curvaceous Epiphone logo with a stylish tail. A set of open-back Grover machineheads fits right in with that pre-war feel. Move south and we leave the 30s behind: the 'upside-down' belly bridge is a feature from 1950 onwards, while the scratchplate has a shape from a post-1955 J-45 or J-50. It's rather oddly-coloured, and if we were to buy this guitar we'd be tempted to buy a nice, properly bevelled replacement guard.

Stepping away from tradition, the AJ-45 has three rosette bands around its soundhole, and the fingerboard overhangs the soundhole with a final bare section that's roomy enough to carry another fret. Classic-era slopes have a space between soundhole and fingerboard that balances the design of the whole guitar; in the Epiphone line, only the Elitist 1964 Texan gets it right. It's merely a small detail, but we miss it.

This is a cleanly-built guitar with a good neck angle. The all-over satin finish and the two-tone sunburst top give a practical, working man's kind of character – and the top really >



The EL-00 Pro's Fishman Sonitone soundhole preamp

The Min-ETune system worked well on all three guitars, but will divide opinion

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

FT-350SCE

In terms of price and auto-tuning, there's nothing presently up against the FT-350SCE, but Gibson has offered a **J-45 Min-ETune £1,899**, and the 2016 catalogue has the **J-45 Progressive $2,999** with G Force tuning, a Tune-O-Matic and PZM pickup.

AJ-45ME/VSS

The **Recording King RAJ-126 £565** is a sunburst slope replica in solid Sitka and mahogany. Epiphone's own **Inspired by 1964 Texan £299** comes with a Shadow NanoFlex; it costs less than the Masterbilt AJ-45, and it also has the correct long scale length.

EL-00 Pro

The **Loar LO-16 £259** is a solid spruce-topped L-00 tribute, available in cool black with a white guard. The **Recording King Troubadour TSR 3 £488** apes the deeper-bodied Gibson Nick Lucas, has a 1.75" nut and is available with a Fishman UST.

is a quality piece of spruce. You get a mahogany back and sides, too, and Epiphone has gone to the trouble of adding mahogany side strips for added reinforcement.

The neck is also mahogany – it's fairly streaky, but all one piece, with no scarfed-on headstock or stacked heel. With a 14-inch fingerboard radius, very low vintage-gauge frets and Epiphone's slim-meets-chubby 'SlimTaper D profile', plus really well-rounded fingerboard edges and a 43mm nut, the AJ is extremely easy in the hand. It has good intonation and a nice action, with enough room for the saddle to come down a shade.

When it comes to tone, this guitar should be shivering in its shoes right now, because next to it sits a real, beaten-up 1958 Epiphone Texan, and it's a heck of a good one, too. But guess what? The Indonesian model acquits itself very well. It can't replicate the prairie-wide openness of the oldie, nor does it match the complexity of the lower mids and the thickness of the trebles, but it's voiced in the right ballpark, with an easy, loose and open feel. There's a furriness to the strum and a nutty plunk to the bottom end and midrange that is quite slope-shouldered in character, and a heavy-gauge pick makes the most of the fair degree of fatness contained within. It's improving all the time, but it's already a cracking guitar.

A Shadow undersaddle pickup is linked to a preamp with soundhole-mounted volume, treble and bass controls (the tiny wheels are very fiddly, and the centre detents on the tone knobs are almost imperceptible). While it's a touch papery sounding, it's an excellent alternative to the Fishman Sonitone system Epiphone fits to many of its guitars, well balanced from string to string, and with a tonality that's easy to work with. Thumbs up.

The EL-00 Pro's mahogany neck is book-ended by a dark heel and headstock

The straight rosewood bridge on the EL-00 Pro

EL-00 Pro

It's always a good day when anything resembling a vintage Gibson L-00 shows up at *G&B*, because it's another of our all-time favourite guitars. The EL-00 Pro brings its own flavour to the party, however, with a smaller soundhole than the Gibson original and a body outline that pinches the lower bout very slightly and brings the waist a fraction further down. It's still very much a pre-war kind of aesthetic, and that two-tone sunburst is gorgeous, while the straight bridge and the super-dark faux-tortoiseshell guard – there's no need for an upgrade here – look great.

This finish is gloss all over, giving a very rich, sophisticated look. The top is solid spruce (and, again, a very nice piece), while the back and sides are laminated mahogany. Realistically, that's entirely to be expected at this impressively low price.

The neck is mahogany, sunbursted at the rear with a dark headstock and dark heel – and, in common with the AJ-45,

EXCELLENT SOUND

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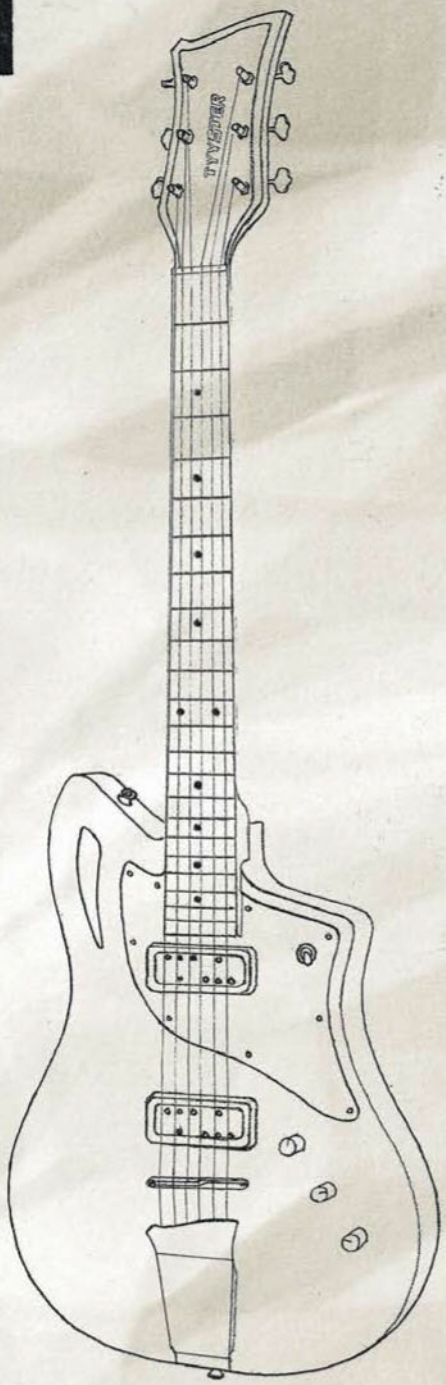

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there's a strap button ready-installed in the correct position on the side of the heel.

The fingerboard is rosewood with front dot markers and black binding to hide the fret ends, and the scale length is the traditional Gibson 24.75 inches. Up top, we've got the slim 60s-design headstock, backed by a set of enclosed Grovers with small metal buttons, and the nut is imitation bone – as is the compensated bridge saddle.

A neck a little wider than this one might have suited the EL-00 well, but it comes with the standard narrow dimensions of 1 11/16", or 42.5mm. The profile is Epiphone's SlimTaper D, and the little EL is a slick-playing guitar with a well-cut nut and nicely fitted small-gauge frets.

The EL-00 Pro has a Fishman Sonicore undersaddle pickup and the Sonitone preamp with volume and tone wheel controls located inside the soundhole.

This guitar doesn't come over like a 30s L-00, but then (almost) nobody has ever managed to replicate the unique character of those amazing instruments with their super-light build and knife-sharp bracing, all backed up by 80 years or so of ageing. It sounds mild, pretty and contained, with a metallic, boxy nasality, which can work quite well for solo vocal accompaniment or, at a pinch, David Rawlings-type flatpicked leads. It's cute-sounding when used with a capo... hardly fulsome or girthy, but bright with cute, poppy mids. However, with its compact size and slim neck, it's an easy, approachable guitar to grab and play any time you get the chance.

Three very different guitars, then, and they do three very different jobs. The FT-350SCE offers its Min-ETune technology at a price many will find hard to refuse. Whether it's the answer to your wildest dreams or a solution to a problem you don't have is up to the individual, but this is a well-built, voluminous and clear-sounding dreadnought.

The little EL-00 Pro is a very handsome and slick-playing sofa picker; in fact, it's hard to believe that it's so affordable. The AJ-45ME's understated vibe, meanwhile, camouflages a great-sounding, slope-shouldered dread – it's big, open and very responsive. Therefore, it's our pick of the bunch... but as long as Epiphone keeps bringing the 'bursts, we'll be happy.

KEY FEATURES

FT-350SCE

- **PRICE** £459, case not included
- **DESCRIPTION** Flat-top cutaway self-tuning electro-acoustic guitar. Made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Solid Sitka spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, three-piece maple neck with volute, 20-fret rosewood fingerboard, cream binding on body and neck with ornate 10-layer purfling on front, rosewood bridge with imitation bone-compensated saddle, Tronical SpeedNut, second strap button on end of heel
- **ELECTRICS** Shadow NanoFlex undersaddle pickup with Shadow ePerformer preamp with volume, bass and treble rotaries, mute and phase buttons, and dynamics slider; integrated battery drawer; Min-ETune auto-tuning system with 12 factory presets and six user presets
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Gloss all over, four options: Antique Natural, Ebony, Violin Burst, Wine Red
- **SCALE LENGTH** 648mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21.5mm at first fret, 25mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.43kg/5.34lbs
- **CONTACT** Gibson Europe **www.epiphone.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Affordable Min-ETune technology
+ Well-featured Shadow pickup
+ Slim, comfy neck
+ Good-sounding acoustically
+ Cuts a dash onstage

– Battery life may be a concern

If whizzy automatic tuning is a boon for what you do, then the FT-350 is the only thing out there in this price range

7/10

KEY FEATURES

AJ-45ME/VSS

- **PRICE** £439, hardcase included
- **DESCRIPTION** Flat-top electro-acoustic guitar. Made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides, cream body binding with five-ply purfling on front, none on rear; triple-ring rosette, one-piece mahogany neck including headstock and heel, 20-fret rosewood fingerboard with dot inlays, rosewood bridge with bone saddle, bone nut, Grover Sta-Tite tuners, two strap buttons
- **ELECTRICS** Shadow NanoFlex undersaddle pickup with Shadow Sonic preamp with soundhole-mounted controls: volume, treble, bass, anti-feedback. Takes two coin-type batteries
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Vintage Sunburst only, satin all over
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 22mm at first fret, 25.5mm at ninth fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.0kg/4.4lbs
- **CONTACT** Gibson Europe **www.epiphone.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Acoustically, one of the nicest modern Epiphones we've played
+ Super-comfortable neck
+ Solid woods throughout
+ Shadow pickup is very decent

– Scratchplate lets the side down
– Fiddly soundhole controls

Beneath the plain looks, this AJ is a warm, characterful strummer, flatpicker and fingerpicker. Excellent

8/10

KEY FEATURES

EL-00 Pro

- **PRICE** £229, case not included
- **DESCRIPTION** Flat-top electro-acoustic guitar. Made in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Solid spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, cream body binding with three-ply purfling on top only, single-ring rosette, mahogany neck, 19-fret black-bound rosewood fingerboard with dot markers, straight rosewood bridge, compensated imitation bone saddle, mini-button enclosed Grover tuners, two strap buttons
- **ELECTRICS** Fishman Sonicore UST, Sonitone preamp with soundhole vol/tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Gloss all over, Vintage Sunburst only
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.5mm at nut, 55mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 22mm at first fret, 24mm at 10th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 56mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2kg/4.4lbs
- **CONTACT** Gibson Europe **www.epiphone.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Very pretty looks
+ Slim neck, good playability
+ OK sound, although perhaps a little restrained
+ Tempting price

– Laminated back and sides

You can't expect it to have a tone like a pre-war guitar, but it sounds pretty fair, plays well and looks the business

7/10

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JAMES COLLINS GTA £1,999
ELECTRIC GUITAR

James Collins GTA

Down in rural East Sussex, James Collins hand builds singular, double-cuts from beautiful timber. **HUW PRICE** tests his GTA...

Should I be forced to choose a single word to describe the James Collins GTA, it would have to be 'formidable' – in looks, feel and weight. It's an absolute timber-fest, too, with a one-piece Honduras mahogany body and a book-matched, flat-quilted maple top cap.

The mahogany neck is set into the body with a mortise and tenon joint and there's no back angle. The neck has a multi-layered construction with a maple/rosewood/maple stringer all along the centre. More quilted maple is used to bind the rosewood fingerboard, which features a maple 'wave' along its length that continues through the rosewood peghead veneer.

There's even a thin layer of maple veneer beneath the rosewood front, which adds definition to the GTA's headstock shape. It's all high-quality timber, and a very thin, almost perfect, high-gloss polyester finish really enhances the grain.

A single Bare Knuckle Black Dog humbucker teams up with volume and tone controls. Collins has come up with the novel approach of seating the T-style knobs in T-type jack cups. The controls must have been pulled into the body through the pickup rout, 'ship in a bottle' style, because there's no control cavity cover on the reverse.

The sides of the fingerboard are bound with maple but not the end, which effectively shows that the 'wave' isn't simply an inlay. In creating the wave motif, Collins demonstrates his impressive woodworking skills by hand-cutting and re-joining the two separate parts of the fingerboard with a maple layer in between. Unfortunately, the finish at the end of the fingerboard does look a bit scruffy when it's compared to the rest of the guitar.

GTA models are built to order, so many of the specifications given here can be changed. However, the standard features include a medium 'C' neck profile, medium frets, a Jensen paper/oil tone capacitor, a Bigsby B5 tremolo and a Hiscox hardshell case.

This is a timber-fest, with a one-piece Honduras mahogany body and a book-matched, flat-quilted maple top cap

In use

There's an art to carving 'fat' necks which feel wonderful, rather than just, erm, fat. The GTA's doesn't quite hit the mark, and my recent experience with mid-1950s Les Paul Goldtops provided clues to explain this – when studied closely directly from the back, the binding on the vintage Gibson necks was clearly visible and I could even make out the dots.

When the GTA is examined in the same way, the binding can't be seen on the neck, which indicates that the profile is more of a straight-sided 'U' than a 'C'. The upshot of this is that it fills the hand but doesn't have that 'comfortable as old slippers' feel. However, Collins will work with >

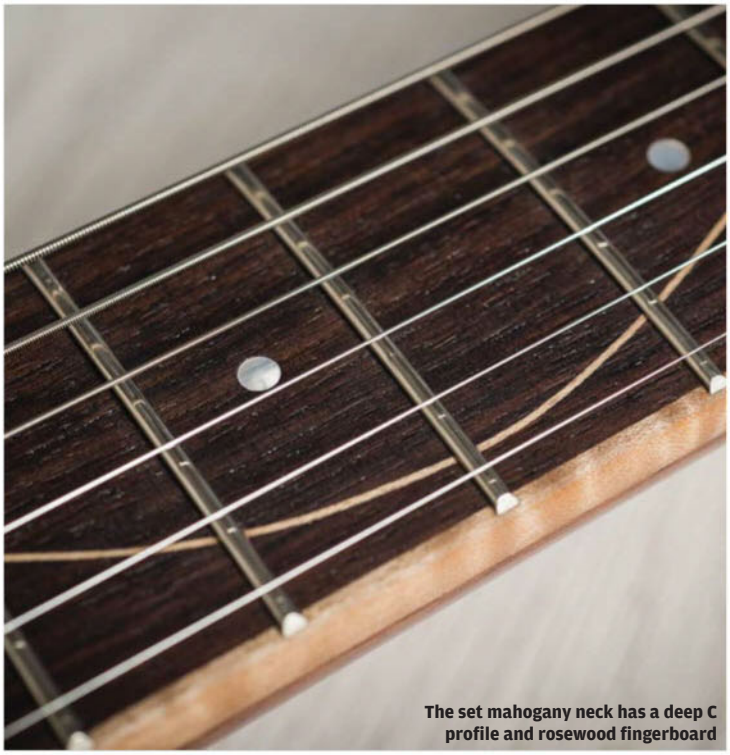
The bridge is recessed to provide the correct break angle for the Bigsby B5

KEY FEATURES

James Collins GTA

- **PRICE** £1,999
- **DESCRIPTION** Solid-body electric guitar, hand-built in the UK
- **BUILD** One-piece Honduras mahogany body with quilted maple cap, set mahogany neck with deep 'C' profile and 12" radius rosewood fingerboard, bone nut and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Vigier fixed bridge and tailpiece, Schaller locking tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Bare Knuckle Black Dog humbucking pickup with volume and tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22mm at first fret, 27mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 37mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.6kg/10.14lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISHES** Poly clear gloss
- **CONTACT** James Collins Guitars 01435 812979 **www.jamescollinsguitars.com**

Collins' 'wave' motif runs through to the end of the headstock


The set mahogany neck has a deep C profile and rosewood fingerboard

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Martin Booth Signature £2,995** is another double-cutaway with a maple cap, that's made in the UK and comes with a floating trem and two pickups. Alternatively, try to track down a second-hand **Gibson Les Paul Double Cut** with a flame top for around **£1,299**.

customers on an individual basis to achieve the neck profile they desire.

Having a neck with no back angle has possibly had a knock-on effect on the positioning of the Bigsby. Since the strings are closer to the body at the bridge position than they would be on, for example, a Les Paul Junior or Standard, the tune-o-matic bridge is obliged to sit in a routed recess.

If you like to dial in a tone and keep things simple, then the GTA could really work for you...

One requirement when installing a Bigsby is to achieve an adequate break angle over the bridge. Because the GTA's bridge is relatively low, the Bigsby's front roller is positioned a little closer to the bridge than might otherwise be the case, simply to make the break angle more acute. The upshot of this is that the position of the Bigsby, combined with the recessed bridge, meant I had to be careful to avoid hitting the Bigsby with my wrist.

Acoustically, there's not a great deal of woody resonance, but the GTA sustains exceptionally well and there's an even volume balance across all of the strings. Starting with clean tones, the GTA delivers a surprisingly jangly and lively tone with snappy definition and a characterful hint of phasiness from the wound strings. The pickup isn't at all microphonic, so it can't quite match the airiness and open treble of an accurate PAF replica, but you can be confident of a squeal-free high-gain response.

The power hinted at by the clean tone comes to the fore when overdrive levels are increased. The bass end's solidity and considerable depth become more apparent and the nasal midrange is transformed to a honking, raunchy bite.

Moving on to high-gain, the GTA is really in its element. Powerchords sound appropriately huge and lead tones combine full-bodied bite with crisp pick attack and sustain. Although there's no treble bleed capacitor across the volume control, you can still back it off to clean up the sound while maintaining a consistent frequency response, clarity and body.

Compared to any two- or three-pickup guitar, a single pup will offer a limited range of tones. However, well configured volume and tone controls should still allow you to cover a lot of ground. The GTA has both, but access is somewhat restricted by the Bigsby and the T-style jack cups. The latter are a neat idea, but viewed from the side you'll see that they sit proud of the top. Maybe a chamfered edge would allow the cups to sit a little lower, to expose more of the control knob and provide better access. It's workable as is, but this tweak would really improve their usability.

Ultimately, the GTA has the sound, feel and (to some extent) look of a type of custom-built guitar that a really good luthier might have produced in the late 1970s or early 1980s. If you like to dial in a tone and keep things simple, then the GTA could really work for you.

It's obvious that the GTA has been made with genuine love and care, and that Collins has incorporated some really good and original ideas. There are some minor details, which I feel aren't quite on the money, but I'm left with a sense that the best is yet to come from this very talented guitar builder and I look forward to seeing more of Collins' work in the future.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ A fine level of craftsmanship
+ Very nicely set 1002up
+ Ample sustain
+ Usable controls
+ Impressive tone

– Bigsby bashes your hand
– It's quite heavy
– Slight finish blemishes at end of neck

High build quality, fine tone woods, solid rock tones and customisable options at a very competitive price.

8/10

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Moog MF Chorus

The synth pioneer has turned its attention to the world of compact guitar stompboxes. **SIMON BRADLEY** finds out what the foog's going on

Robert Moog is considered to be the father of modern synthesizers, and although he sadly passed away in 2005, his legacy lives on. Guitarists have had their ears bamboozled by Moogerfooger stompboxes for a few years now, and these hardwood-encased contraptions can seriously twist your aural melon...

Now we've got our hands on one of six newish Minifoogers, a series of compact pedals which, although they lean towards convention in certain respects, still provide dollops of the otherworldly weirdness that continues to make Moog gear so sought after.

Each pedal in the range is based around 'bucket brigade' circuitry, an innovation which has largely been rendered obsolete by the advent of RAM-based digital delay technology. We don't have sufficient space here to go into the dark art of how a brigade arrangement of capacitors (or 'buckets') and clock chips serves to provide delays and modulations, but it's this design which imparts the classic analogue signal degeneration that's so revered by players.

The pedal's tank-like aluminium chassis, complete with angled front plate, is satisfyingly old school in its livery and, unlike the Moogerfoogers, its footprint shouldn't take up too much space on most players' pedalboards.

It features four controls, alongside a three-way microswitch that gives a choice of preset bases upon which to construct your sounds. There's also an input for an optional expression pedal, a mono instrument input, and a mono/stereo output. To use the latter in stereo, you flip a small internal switch and use a TRS splitter or Y cable.

Power comes from a PP3 battery or an optional nine-volt PSU, and the MF Chorus offers true bypass.

In use

Setting the mix switch in the downward position gives the subtlest chorus base and, with the time and feedback controls set to zero, the MF sounds like a quality analogue modulation – all warmth, shimmers and movement. For a deeper, richer effect, flick the switch to the centre and dial in a touch of time and feedback – think Rush's Alex Lifeson in his satin-caped pomp.

The mix switch's upward position is described by Moog as a vibrato, but it's more of a throbby flanger. With all four controls set to halfway, the sound oscillates and wibbles somewhat disconcertingly. It's pure Moog weirdness and can be truly inspirational, but is easily pulled back to a more usable setting. The time pot is the most efficient at reigning in the atonal nature of these more extreme settings, and you can also use an expression pedal to control the effect rate in real time.

It's always fun to dig out genuinely crazy sounds and, due to the expansive operational range of the MF Chorus's four controls, the choice here is virtually limitless. For example, we found a palette of full-on *Forbidden Planet* soundscapes, a mutated, 1950s-style echo and an effect that Moog describes as 'film projector'.

The fact that the MF Chorus is more than adept at providing some truly organic, eminently usable choruses and flangers alongside the craziness is a testament to its design excellence, and we certainly found it far more straightforward to use than any of the undeniably brilliant Moogerfoogers that we've tried. We love it and we're sure that you will too...

It's always fun to dig out genuinely crazy sounds and, due to the expansive controls, the choice is virtually limitless

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The **EHX Good Vibes £94** evokes the 60s with aplomb, thanks to both chorus and vibrato modes. **MXR's M234 Analog Chorus £84** boasts high/low EQ pots, plus rate, depth and level, while the **TC Electronic Corona £92** offers true stereo and two chorus modes.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Versatile performance
+ Easy to use
+ Sturdy construction
+ Impressive range of modulations
+ Sounds can be truly disconcerting

- Maybe missing a mix control
- Not cheap
- No out-of-the-box stereo operation

The fact that the MF Chorus has myriad conceivable uses is impressive. It's well built, sounds great and wears its analogue heart unashamedly on its sleeve. From some lovely choruses to all-out sonic craziness, it offers a tone or three for everyone.

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Moog MF Chorus

- **PRICE** £159
- **DESCRIPTION** Analogue bucket brigade modulation pedal with true bypass
- **CONTROLS** Rate, depth, time, feedback, three-way mix switch
- **FEATURES** On/off footswitch, mono input, mono/stereo output, input for optional expression pedal, internal mono/stereo switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 225 (w) x 58 (h) x 144mm (d)
- **CONTACT** Source Distribution 020 8962 5080 **www.moogmusic.com**

Photo by Jordan Curtis Hughes

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Radial Headload

A guitarist's 'Swiss army knife' with switchable attenuation, EQ-able direct cab-sim outputs and more. **HUW PRICE** gets loaded

The Headload is many things, but first and foremost it's an attenuator. Many will already be familiar with the process of plugging powerful valve amps into an attenuator, then cranking up to optimise your tone at volume levels which are practical for smaller gigs, studio and home use.

However, Radial refers to the Headload as a 'load box' because it's equipped with the Radial JDX direct box, which the company says "captures both the signal from the head plus the reactive load from the speaker cabinet for a more natural feel".

The Headload can handle up to 120 watts RMS and transient peaks up to 180 watts. Our unit was 8 ohms only, but 4- and 16-ohm versions are available and the Headload has a second speaker output to drive an extension cabinet.

Onboard are cement-encrusted, epoxy-coated copper resistor coils coupled with a cooling fan. Interestingly, the signal level from the amp governs the speed of the fan. The attenuator has six switchable settings and the lowest is tied to a trim control, which can dial the power down from 20 per cent to one per cent.

There's also an off position, which can be selected when you're using the headphone output, or if you're recording via the JDX direct outputs. Direct signals can be taken pre/post JDX equalisation. Both balanced outputs have ground lift switching and the post-EQ out has polarity switching. The pre- and post-EQ unbalanced outs share a level control, but there's no ground lift and polarity is fixed. A speaker must be connected at all times – even when in 'silent' mode.

The onboard Radial Phazer is a phase adjustment tool, which allows you to time-align the JDX output with signals from the speaker or a microphone in front of the cabinet. The Loadbox can be used free-standing, but a rackmount kit is also available – it's easy enough to fit the 'ears' and remove the handle. The power supply is external and connects to the Loadbox via a locking 4-pin XLR.

The attenuator has six settings and the lowest is tied to a trim control, which can dial down from 20 to one per cent

Sounds

As with so many power soak devices, it's sometimes hard to determine how and why the tone changes as attenuation is increased. It's well established that our perceptions of high- and low-frequency content change along with volume, and the Headload's resonance switches are on there to compensate.

Then there are speakers to consider. Where hi-fi and studio monitors are concerned, linearity is paramount, but guitar speakers are generally prized for the way they colour the tone, not to mention their compression and overload characteristics when pushed hard. So when an attenuator is used, the sound may change substantially, even if it does a good job of maintaining the integrity of the amplifier's tone.

Reviewing the Headload at the same time as the Marshall Astoria Classic provided an opportunity to compare the Headload with the amp's onboard power scaling, and thereby remove the speaker as a variable to a large extent.

The Headload setting that corresponded most closely with the Astoria's five-watt power scaling was around 60 per cent and the sonic results were consistent. The Astoria Classic's onboard power scaling retained the sound of the amp extremely well, but with the >

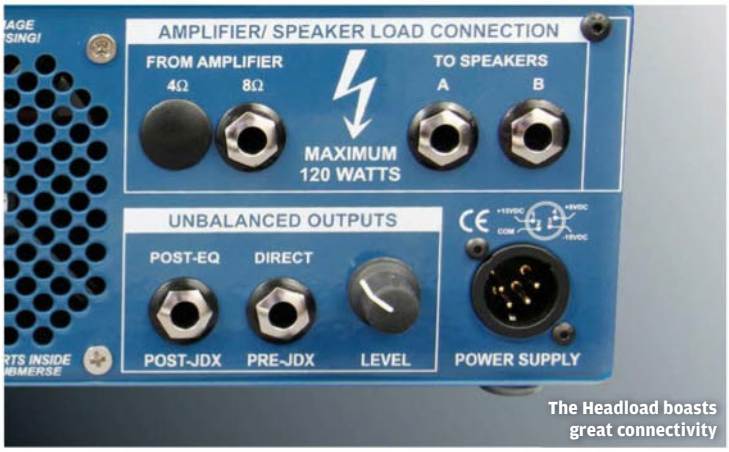
KEY FEATURES

Radial Headload

- **PRICE** £1,099
- **DESCRIPTION** Resistive attenuator with integral direct box, balanced and unbalanced direct outputs, phase correction tool and headphone output. Made in Canada
- **CONTROLS** Load resonance hi/lo switches, range trim, load switch, low/high EQ, speaker cab voicing switch, phaser shift & 360 degree switch, headphone level
- **DIMENSIONS** 305 (w) x 88 (d) x 154mm (h)
- **WEIGHT** 3.75kg
- **CONTACT** Shure Distribution 01992 703058 **www.radialeng.com**

The onboard EQ controls allow you to shape the output

There are six attenuator settings, plus a trim control



The Headload boasts great connectivity

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The remarkable **Millennia TD-1 Twin Direct HV-3 £1,676** is a microphone pre-amp, DI box, mic/line preamp and power soak. Featuring 12AT7 tube or FET signal paths, DAW outputs, power-amp outputs, two-band NSEQ-2 parametric EQ, DI input and a total of nine outputs, including reamp outputs that emulate humbucker and single coils. Alternatively, check out the **SPL Transducer £680** or the **Fryette Power Station £499**, which attenuates and boosts using a valve amplifier.

Headrush there was a very slight loss of high frequencies and bass weight. The attenuator's 'lo' resonance switch compensated pretty well, but some lower midrange definition was lost.

Activating the 'hi' resonance restored the Astoria Classic's chime and clarity, and any remaining differences were so minor that they could be corrected with subtle shifts of the amp's tone controls.

To test the Headload's direct output, we swapped over to a Dr Z. combo. As impressive as the attenuator's performance was, the Headload's direct out is even better. You can use it in combination with the amplifier's onboard speaker, or switch the attenuator to the 'off' position, in order to mute the amp.

As impressive as the attenuator's performance was, the Headload's direct out is even better...

As there's no output level control for the balanced direct outputs, they're best connected to a mic preamp. Direct devices can often sound sterile and fizzy, but the Headload is very natural.

There's a lot of onboard tone shaping, too. Simple bass and treble adjustments are made using the low and high controls of the EQ section, but the voicing switch is where the magic happens. It appears to comprise six preset equalisation curves with various midrange voicings, to simulate a range of cabinet and speaker types. These options allow you to try to match the setting to your regular speaker, dial in something complimentary or even totally different.

It's a more than viable alternative to mic'ing up a cabinet, and the sound quality is good enough for recording and live work. However, our test amp had an onboard spring reverb, which was less evident in the Headload's output than through the amplifier speaker.

For best results, you may find that a touch of studio-grade compression will help to provide a more natural playing feel, and many recording channels have built-in compressors these day. At least you won't also need equalisation, but should you prefer to add your own processing, you can use the Headload's pre-equalisation direct output instead.

When you combine the direct out with a microphone signal, or even the sound straight off the speaker, there's likely to be some degree of phase shift due to time delay. Activating the Headload's 'Phazer' feature can compensate for this, as it employs a variable, all-analogue delay circuit to re-align the signals.

Technically, the two signals will be most closely aligned when the sound is at its fattest and most full-bodied, but some degree of phase shift can help to sculpt the sound by introducing comb filtering at various frequencies. There's no set way of achieving this balance between the signals, except to use your ears – suffice to say, if it sounds great to you, then you're good to go.

The Headload is a well-designed multi-purpose tool for gigging, recording and practising. It's easy to use, sounds impressive and achieves great results without fuss or noise.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

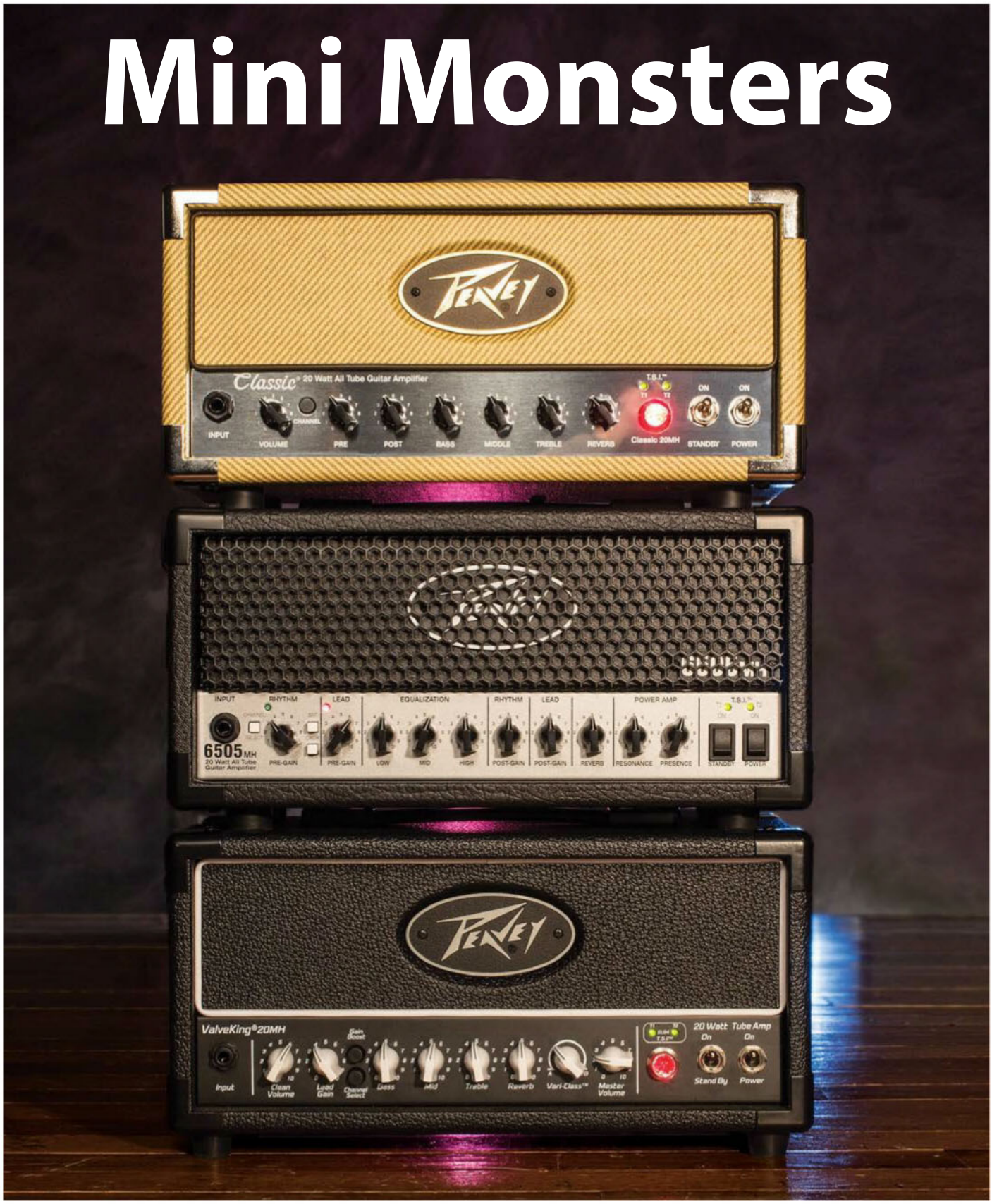
+ Several direct output options
+ Very effective cabinet-voicing switch and EQ
+ The Phazer acts as a correction tool and tone shaper
+ Robust build quality

- Fairly large box
- The rubber feet are too small to clear a typical amp handle
- External power supply

A well designed and easy to use, multi-purpose tool for guitarists, which will help you get the best from any amp in any situation and preserve your hearing

8/10

Mini Monsters



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Boss RV-6 Reverb

Boss has upped its reverberation game with an eight-voiced digital stomper... will **RICHARD PURVIS** be feeling a hall lotta love?

Not so long ago, reverb was basically an amp thing. Most likely, you'd have a delay of some kind on your pedalboard, but the only people enjoying authentic 'church hall' sounds were rackmount-flexing studio pros and vicars. For stompbox makers, it seemed, space really was the final frontier – and for a long time after Boss launched the RV-2 Digital Reverb pedal in 1987, there wasn't an awful lot of competition.

But then came a revolution in DSP technology, making it far easier for the sonic boffins to put a convincing simulation of cavernous space into a box the size of a hamster's garden shed. Of course, plenty of amps still come with onboard spring reverb, but many players would happily do without that extra bulk now that a compact stompbox can so easily fake it, and offer so much more besides.

Thus, handy little floor-dwelling 'verbs are seemingly suddenly everywhere and a lot of them are pretty darned tasty, meaning that Boss's new RV-6 is taking on a much stronger field than the original RV-2 ever had to contend with.

Boss has responded to the challenge by improving on the existing RV-5 with more powerful processing and an expanded palette. The RV-5 has six reverb types, which may have cut it a few years back, but starts to look a bit stingy now. The RV-6 ups that count to eight, losing the gated effect and adding three new ones: dynamic, shimmer and +delay. Long-time Boss geeks will recall that the old RV-3 included delay, and some of them will surely be delighted to see its return.

There are three more differences that you may spot before you've plugged in the RV-6: the control panel has changed from white on black to a classy brushed metal look, the word 'Digital' has disappeared from the name and there's a third input on the right-hand side. This is for an expression pedal to control the effect depth – the manual recommends parent company Roland's EV-5 unit (RRP £55) and warns of scary consequences if you use anything else. That leaves two guitar inputs, which can work with stereo sources, and also hide a clever little trick – the dry signal passes through the pedal from input A in unmolested analogue, but if you use input B instead, what comes out is a 'wet only' sound. It's the twin outputs that promise to be the real secret weapon, though – hugeness sounds so much more compelling in stereo. The RV-6 is built to the familiar Boss format, in a brick-like metal enclosure with the battery compartment nestling beneath the footswitch, and it's easily accessed via the screw at the front. Mind you, it should be said that digital effects pedal such as this get through batteries like my Auntie Liz gets through cream cakes, and you're better off with a nine-volt mains adaptor.

The two guitar inputs hide a clever little trick... if you use input B, what comes out is a 'wet only' sound

Before we get to the sound of the unit, we do need to mention a couple of design shortcomings. Firstly, the input/output arrows on the top of the pedal aren't aligned with the output sockets. A more significant issue is the way the eight reverb modes are accessed via a tiny rotary control, which has the names so crammed around it that fiddliness is taken to a whole new level.

Both of these gripes are a direct result of the RV-6's heritage – the classic Boss layout doesn't really leave room for anything better, so until someone decides to think the unthinkable and make that monster footswitch a bit smaller, there isn't really an easy solution to the issue. >

KEY FEATURES

Boss RV-6 Reverb

- **PRICE** £119
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital reverb pedal. Made in Taiwan
- **CONTROLS** Effect level, tone and time, plus eight-way mode control: modulate, spring, plate, hall, room, dynamic, shimmer, +delay; bypass footswitch; 9V power input, stereo inputs and outputs, expression pedal input
- **CONTACT** Roland UK 01792 702701 **www.roland.co.uk**

You may struggle to find the right mode on a darkened stage

With eight modes in the classic Boss box, the RV-6 more than justifies a space on your 'board

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **TC Electronic Hall Of Fame £105** wins the versatility prize, via its TonePrint technology for beaming in new sounds from your smartphone. The **Electro-Harmonix Cathedral £135** has eight reverb modes and six knobs' worth of tweakability, while the **DigiTech Polara £109** brings seven Lexicon algorithms into one deeply freaky-looking pedal.

In use

We'll work our way around the mode dial from the top, leaving the new additions until last, and that means starting with the modulated setting. This is the 'verby equivalent of the chorus-treated delay repeats in an Electro-Harmonix Memory Man, adding just enough wobble to give a hint of added warmth and depth. It is, in two words, ridiculously pretty.

The modulation is rich yet subtle – there's no throbbing or swamping of the dry notes, just an intangible lushness. It's deeply addictive, especially in stereo. It would be nice to have control over the degree of modulation, but why tamper with perfection?

From this, we move to the relatively mundane spring setting and now we'll need our hyper-critical ears on: it's going up against the real spring reverb in a 50-year-old blackface Fender, and if there's an audible difference, it's failed.

The dynamic reverb responds to your playing – hit hard and it will retreat into the background... Awesome stuff

Well, it takes a bit of tweaking to match up the Boss to its vintage inspiration, most notably with the tone control, but once we get there it really is just about identical – and with virtually zero background hiss.

The plate, hall and room modes sound every bit as pure as they should, with the tone control again nicely judged to damp down the top end just as much as needed. In hall mode, there's a full-size cathedral of 'verb on offer when you max out the effect level and time. The pre-delay is totally natural and you can almost hear the congregation shuffling their hymn sheets.

And so we come to the three new modes. The dynamic reverb is another with modulation – slightly more of it, in fact – but its defining characteristic is the way it responds to your playing, much like Line 6's 'ducking' effect: hit the strings hard and it will retreat into the background, then swell again when there's space to be filled. Awesome stuff.

Shimmer is the RV-6's most obviously digital voice. It's essentially reverb with an added octave effect, but pull back on the tone and it becomes something less shrieky and more textural – it's a specialised sound, but one which offers great creative potential. Finally, +delay creates an atmospheric blend of hall reverb and digital delay, with the tone knob now controlling delay feedback, and while there's only minimal treble filtering on the repeats, it sounds – like just about everything in this amazing box – very nice indeed.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Expanded range of beautifully natural reverbs
+ The ultra-lush settings are a shoegazer's dream
+ The usual solid Boss build

- Good luck finding your way around that mode control on a dark stage
- No 'trails off' option

Excellent, inspirational stuff from Boss... this could have been a 10/10 if not for the awkward control layout

9/10

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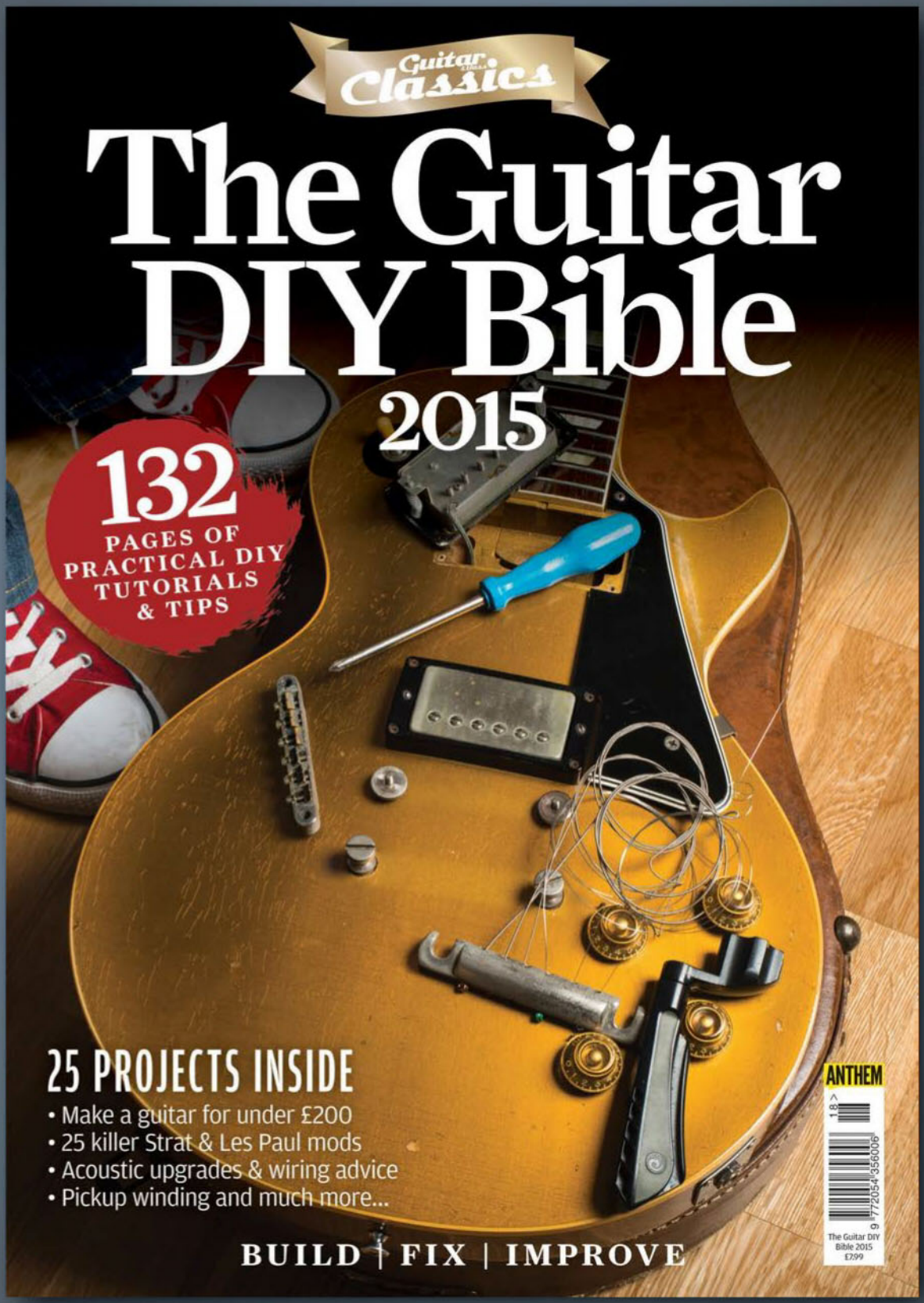

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Six of the best

Why should tone-shaping effects units be the sole preserve of guitarists? Here are six creative pedals to spice up your bass sound

Boss Bass Chorus

PRICE £75 **CONTACT** roland.co.uk

Adding chorus to your bass rig can be an effective way to beef up and widen the sound. Like its much-loved six-string sibling the CE-2, the CEB-3 is a compact stompbox that applies chorus to the high frequencies of your sound without muddying low frequencies or sacrificing the body and clarity of the original sound. With level, low filter, rate and depth knobs, it's a simple yet highly configurable chorus pedal offering everything from subtle modulation to a synth-like effect in a familiar robust, space-saving Boss enclosure.

Z.Vex Woolly Mammoth

PRICE £299 **CONTACT** zvex.com

This hand-painted boutique fuzz box has been used by renowned bassists such as Muse's Chris Wolstenholme. It delivers a furious fuzz tone that's equally at home with guitars, with a pinch control that adjusts the pulse width of the waveform. There's also a 'gentle' gate for silencing your instrument between notes or phrases, and an EQ control that smoothly selects between more bass and more treble. The Woolly Mammoth also comes with a liftetime warranty.

This latest version of the POG 2 takes the sound-sculpting wizardry up a level

Electro-Harmonix POG 2

PRICE £259 **CONTACT** ehx.com

Released in 2005, the original POG – polyphonic octave generator – was much loved by guitarists and bassists alike, and this latest version of the pedal takes the sound-sculpting wizardry up a level. Introducing a new attack control to enable fading in of massive ambient swells, a second sub-octave and the ability to save up to eight of your favourite sounds as presets, the Electro-Harmonix POG 2 really is the ultimate bass pedal for sonic adventurers. Offering two octaves up and down, the POG will fatten up your tone for a monstrous bass sound, emulating the sound of guitar-free bands such as Royal Blood. You can use it to produce organ-like sounds, too. >

Dive bombs, pitch bending and chorus-like effects make the DigiTech Bass Whammy just about the most fun that it's possible to have with a bass

Analog Alien Bass Station

PRICE £336 **CONTACT** analogalien.com

This vibrant green multi-effects unit from US company Analog Alien offers pretty much everything that the modern-day bassist could want, and is designed to be used live or in the studio. Its effects are split into three sections: Limiter/Compressor, Amp Generator – which the company says has the characteristics of a vintage tube amp – and Gamma Fuzz, a harmonically-rich fuzz effect designed specifically for bass. Within those three categories, there are bass, treble, gain and output controls to further tailor the sound. It's also said to be a pretty useful tool for six-string players – just don't tell your guitarist...

DigiTech Bass Whammy

PRICE £179 **CONTACT** digitech.com

The next-generation version of this legendary pitch-shifting pedal builds on the original 90s model with settings optimised for bass frequencies. It has classic and new polyphonic chord tracking modes, MIDI input and 21 different pitch presets. The footswitch has also been upgraded from the previous plastic version to a durable metal design that will stand up to whatever you can throw at it onstage. Dive bombs, pitch bending and chorus-like effects make this just about the most fun it's possible to have with a bass.

Ashdown NM2

PRICE £99 **CONTACT** ashdownmusic.com

This cleverly conceived double drive pedal was the brain-child of Foo Fighters bassist Nate Mendel, and was designed specifically by him in association with Ashdown. It delivers a two-output stereo distortion for a wall of low-end sound. Both of the outputs provide the original signal plus two different distortion types, giving you an adjustable mix of rich drive and the original tone. Ashdown's VU meter and metal casing and knobs give this versatile dynamic drive box a robust and sophisticated feel that defies its fairly modest price tag. If you do want to add some grit to your sound without sacrificing your core tone, then you should give Nate's signature pedal a try.

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VOX
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Vintage BENCH TEST

1967 FENDER CUSTOM TELECASTER

A special place in guitar history may be reserved for pre-CBS Fenders, but **HUW PRICE** finds that this 60s Custom has many of the features of that golden age

A very long time ago, describing a guitar as 'vintage' rather than merely second-hand depended, to some extent, on whether it was made before or after 1965. Things have changed a lot since then, but for Fenders a difference in kudos and collectability lingers on between pre- and post-CBS guitars.

In a sense, it's arbitrary because many 'pre-CBS' features carried over into the CBS years, and Fender was still turning out some fantastic instruments when this Custom Telecaster (not to be confused with the Telecaster Custom of the 1970s) left the factory gates in 1967. Although it has pearl dots rather than clay, an off-white guard and the neck profile differs slightly, this lightweight lovely is essentially no different from any Custom made in the last two or three years of Leo Fender's ownership.

The fingerboard is a veneer of very pale rosewood in unexpectedly fresh condition

My soft spot for '67 Customs stems from an extended loan of a black-bound example with a maple board. I loved the sound and playability of that guitar so much that I still feel a pang whenever I see that transitional logo with the slightly gothic script. The headstock is a little bit thicker than usual, measuring a full 5/8" rather than the more common 9/16". Consequently, the tuner posts sit very low in their bushings. As you would expect, these are 'double line' Klusons that pre-date the less desirable 'F'-branded variety by about a year. Under the control panel, everything looks just as it should, with the original switch, potentiometers and ceramic 0.05uF tone capacitor.

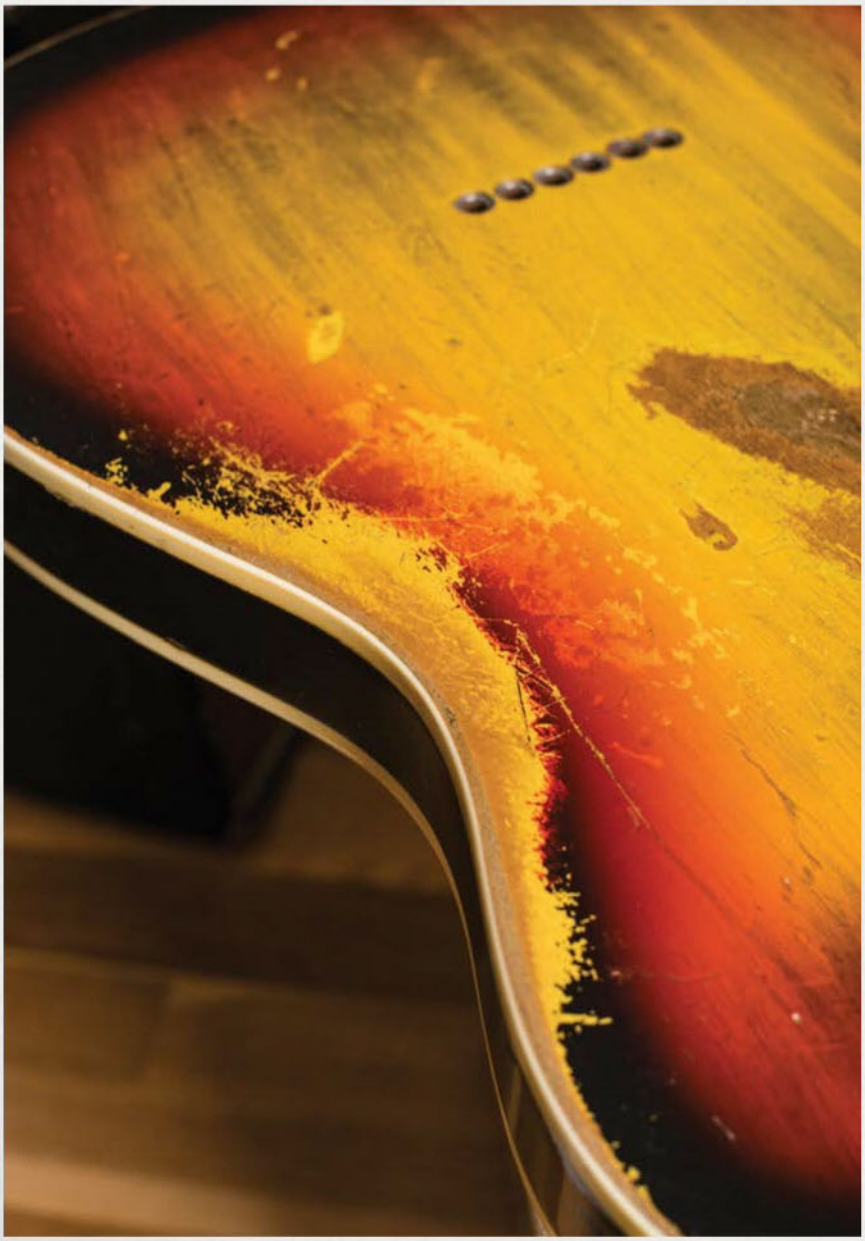
The fingerboard is a veneer of very pale rosewood, and it's in unexpectedly fresh condition considering the patina of the finish. Not everybody appreciates >

This 1967 Custom shares many of the features of Fenders made before Leo Fender's departure

KEY FEATURES

1967 Fender Custom Telecaster

- **SCALE LENGTH** 650 mm/25.5"
- **NECK WITH** 42mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 19mm at first fret, 20mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.3Kg
- **FINISH** Faded three-tone burst
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 029 2039 8215 **www.cranesmusicstore.com**



Above (left) **Decades of fading have left this Tele with a tasteful finish, with the colours more vibrant on the back**
Above (right) **The tuners are in fine fettle and the tuning is stable**

mid-60s Fender 'target' 'bursts, but I like this one a lot because substantial fading has ensured it's not too lurid. The colours are much more vivid on the back, so you can get a sense of what this guitar looked like when it was new.

The wear is extensive, yet natural and graceful, and the layers that make up the finish are easy to distinguish. A slightly tinted sealer coat went on first, followed all over by an opaque yellow. Clear red of the tomato soup variety came next, taking on an orangey scarlet look, thanks to the yellow beneath. Then the darker outer edge went on, followed by clear coats.

The wear is extensive, yet natural, and the layers that make up the finish are easy to distinguish

In use

It has often been my experience that heavily worn guitars such as this one are best admired from a distance. It's not that they aren't enjoyable to play, but you may feel a compelling urge to wash your hands as soon as you're done. Although this Custom looks like one of those elegant mingers, it's actually as clean as could be, and I loved playing it.

The next surprise was the neck profile, because it felt almost modern, despite the finish having worn to something approaching a bare wood texture. When you're used to playing contemporary guitars, adjusting to the peculiarities of vintage-style V, baseball bat or super-skinny neck profiles can be off-putting. This neck wouldn't be out of place on any modern guitar, so what you lose in vintage character, you gain in comfort and playability.

The depth remains fairly constant along the whole length, meaning there's barely any taper. Although I didn't test it with a gauge, the fingerboard looks and feels flatter than a vintage Fender-spec 7.25 inches, so the strings are set low and they bend easily without choking out. Two other attributes also contribute to the contemporary feel – the tuners operate smoothly and the tuning is very stable.

Acoustic tones were extremely encouraging, combining full low-mid resonance with breezy sprang, exceptional sustain and impressive volume. There's also a snap to the treble that makes the >

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Above (left) **The bridge pickup yields a lovely, classic old-school jangle**
Above (right) **This is an ultra-cool Telecaster that you could take out of the case and play onstage at a gig with no worries over its performance**

guitar sound like a Tele before it has even been plugged in. All the really good examples seem to be a bit like this.

Worries about muffled neck tones were quickly dispelled, largely as a result of ludicrous amounts of microphony. If you tap this guitar anywhere on the pickguard, the neck pickup behaves like a contact microphone. It's not uncommon amongst Teles of this era, and whilst it does wonders for clean tones, woe betide you if you attempt to use it with a fuzzbox. I tried it and fancy footwork was required to obviate squeal.

The string wrap around the bridge pickup looks too clean and dust-free, considering the condition of the hardware and finish. I would be inclined to dig deeper and check whether it has been rewound. Despite ohming out at a tad over 8K, this pickup didn't sound overwound at all, and the tone was discernibly old-school in a clangy and jangly sort of way. Adjusting it closer to the strings filled out the sound to produce Stax-era Steve Cropper rhythm tones, with increased levels of overdrive accompanying the classic Telecaster chime, grind and clang.

In contrast – and I do like contrast in Teles – the neck pickup is super-sweet and almost delicate. Although the inherent woodiness is apparent enough on the bridge setting, it plays an even greater part with the neck pickup. Earthy and jazzy tones abound for clear chord voicings and nuanced blues licks, and the phasey scoop of the middle position delivers exactly what you need for country-style picking.

It's a rare example of a vintage guitar with no playability issues whatsoever

Although 50s Teles may be held in the highest esteem by most collectors, late-60s models can be every bit as cool in their own way. The microphony may prove troublesome with some playing styles, and the possibility of an albeit stellar re-wind may put off some collectors, but this Custom delivers everything you could expect of a Tele and more. You would be able to walk out of the shop with this guitar and gig with it the same night because it's a rare example of a vintage guitar with no playability issues whatsoever.

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"Compact, loud and musical, with benchmark playability... Both these guitars are greater than the sum of their parts."

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"Great look, nice balanced tone, lovely V profile neck"
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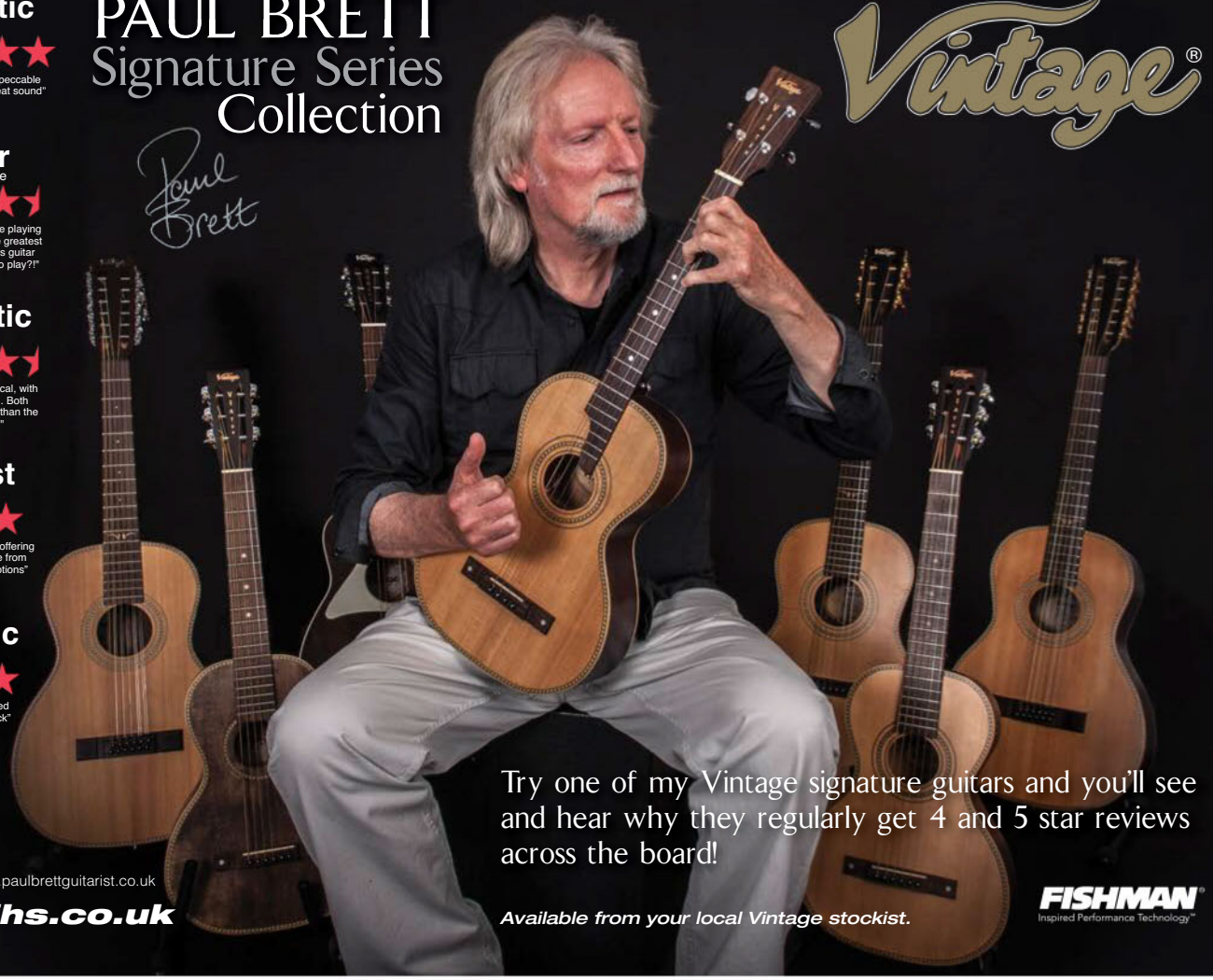

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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

ALPHA MALE

Alphabetic guitarist Walter Heale is a big fan of Jazzmasters and Gretsches, often modded. He takes **LARS MULLEN** on a tour of his enviable collection

"I'm happy to say that I am a Jazzmaster guy," confirms Walter Heale, the guitarist in London indie-dance quartet Alphabetic. "It's a pure analogue guitar sound all the way for me, rather like Robert Smith did in the early days of The Cure with his Fender Jazzmasters, and Tom Verlaine in Television during the second half of the 1970s. I loved that period and some of the bands that came out of New York with a sort of stripped-back punk-pop vibe.

"Alphabetic includes electric piano and synths in the mix, which blend well with the Jazzmaster.

"I play this refinished Jazzmaster a lot, even though it's actually the sum of many parts, with a '63 body and a neck from '62, on which sits a tightly grained rosewood fingerboard that looks like ebony. This sunburst model, which is fitted with a Strat vibrato arm, is in exceptional condition for a '61 example. It's a fantastic all-rounder and I particularly like the slab fingerboard."

Like so many vintage Fender guitars finished in Olympic White, over the decades Walter's favourite Jazzmaster has taken on the classic 'mellow yellow' hue.

"This one is from '65 and quite rare, as it was the only model that year with the fingerboard binding, pearl dot inlays and the matching headstock, which has also faded. This is the one I use all the time now in the studio and playing live. It just works for me – it's a very versatile guitar and I think the sound is unique. I love the combination of the rosewood fingerboard and the fat sound of the neck pickup, especially through a Fender amp – my old Fender Musicmaster Bass amp works a treat.

"Fender XIIs have such a big sound and are still, arguably, the best electric 12-string ever built"

"I use a lot of pedals, which work so well with Fender amps. I'm a fan of old analogue pedals, I love playing with compression and wet effects which fill out the sound, but I pull all that back a little if I'm using either of these two Fender electric XIIs, as they have such a big sound from the start and are still, arguably, the best electric 12-string ever built.

"I first saw Edwyn Collins play one, then Johnny Marr in The Smiths. This one dating from '67 has been stripped back to the wood at some time. I thought about refinishing it in sunburst, but I may just keep it as it is. The other one is a sunburst '66 and the one that I keep at home, >

Above, **Alphabetic guitarist Walter Heale and his collection**

1961 sunburst (left) and refinished 1962/3 Jazzmaster

Heale cradles his 1965 Jazzmaster

Heale's 1965 and 1967 Fender XIIs

The Fender XII's 'hockey stick' headstock

as it's almost mint. I used this one on several tracks on Alphabetic's new album, which is set for release early next year."

Walter also has a couple of cool Strats – one for the road and the other for home use.

"I have a very clean '65, which just comes out to say hello now and again – it's just too clean to take out gigging," he says. "I try to look after my guitars, but they live a proper life on the road, and this one is a bit too perfect for that. This '72 model is the one for gigs – I bought it off one of the roadies from Manfred Mann's Earth Band. He bought it from one of the guys in the band. It was originally sunburst, but as he was a big Hendrix fan he refinished it in white.

"It has all the classic tones and a bit more spank from the maple fingerboard. I saw it on eBay while I was ill in bed after a hernia operation. The only thing I could think of to cheer me up was to buy a guitar, and I certainly felt better after that. I couldn't drive to pick it up, so I had to get my wife to do the honours.

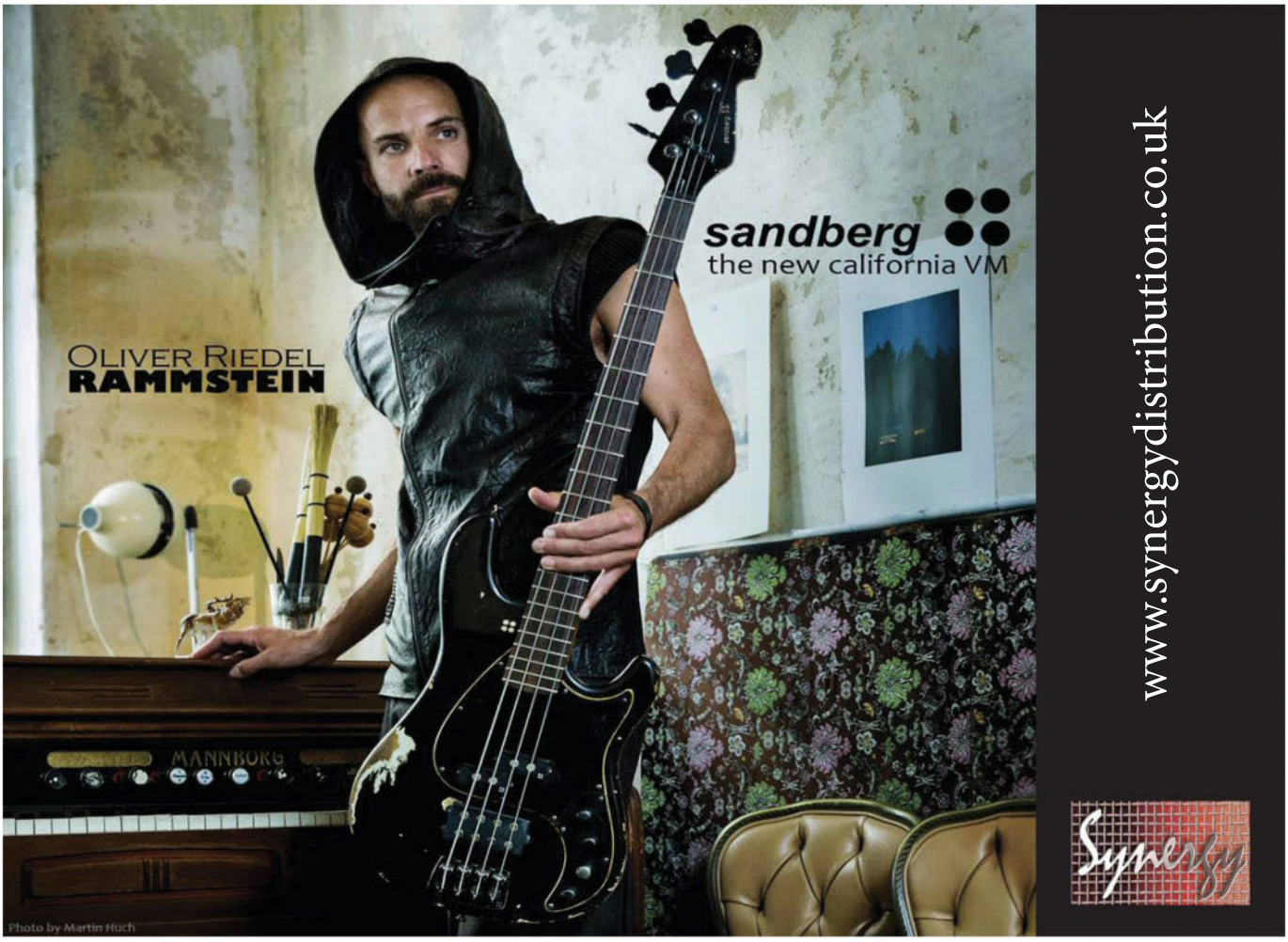
"A good old Tele is a must-have in most people's collections. I have several benchmark Tele players – Graham Coxon from Blur, for example. This butterscotch model is certainly vintage, but not age-consistent. The body and electrics are from '52, while the neck is one of the first reissues from the early 80s. Judging by the scuffing around the control plate, it's certainly done some work. I used this one on our new single, called *The Fall*. I write a lot with a bass guitar at home, so there's always a need for the odd bass; these two Fender Precisions from '65 and '75 are my favourites. Like a Telecaster, they just do it, don't they?"

"When I saw Billy Duffy with his White Falcon, I thought it was the coolest guitar I'd ever seen"

There's a noticeable effect on Walter's body language at the mere mention of a big-bodied Gretsch semi-acoustic...

"Ah yes, any large semi, really, but if it's a Gretsch I dare not operate machinery or drive," he says, laughing. "There's just something about these big guitars, they look and sound so good. When I saw Billy Duffy from The Cult with his White Falcon in the mid-80s, I just thought it was the coolest guitar I'd ever seen. I've had >

Above, left to right, **1972 (left) and 1965 Strats in front of Walter's Fender Musicmaster Bass amp; 1952 Tele with early-80s neck; 1965 (left) and 1975 Precisions**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Above, left to right, **1962 Gretsch Country Gent Thinline; 1965 Chet Atkins Tennessean; 1968 Black Hawk**

several pass through my hands, having settled on these next three now for several years.

"My '62 Country Gent Thinline has been a real player's guitar and ticks all my boxes, Cadillac Green, gold hardware and played within an inch of its life. It's still as strong as an ox, though, and sounds beautiful. I've always thought that if a guitar looks like this, it's been someone's number one, so it has to be good.

"This '65 Gretsch Chet Atkins Tennessean is a little cleaner. As you can see, it's been fitted with Gibson humbuckers – hence it was a lot cheaper – but it really appealed. I may at some point return it to the original spec, if I can source some original low-output pickups.

"This double-cutaway Gretsch Black Hawk from '68 is a little rare. I think it was only in production for about a year. Again, it's been bashed about quite a bit, with paint dabbed here and there. Some of the parts have been changed and the bindings have the classic 'Gretsch rot' – which I'm looking into – but it just has so much character, visually and sonically.

"I love the big, twangy Gretsch sound, especially drenched in reverb and echo, with lots of vibrato"

"Over the years, these old guitars have probably been used for all styles – I'd love to know some of their history. I bought this one from a guy in Liverpool.

"I love the big, twangy Gretsch sound, especially drenched in reverb and echo, with lots of vibrato going on. I'm quite vigorous with the Bigsby, it's a big part of my sound. I use very heavy strings, so I rarely have any tuning problems. I always thought that Bernard Butler was the king of the Bigsby...

"For extreme 'dives', use this Fender Champ lap steel [next page, bottom left] with a ton of wet effects. I love this guitar, and it looks cool finished in Desert Sand.

"If you look closely at this '64 Gibson ES-345 [next page, top left] you'll see the scars where it was once converted for a left-handed player [next page, top right], but it's now back to its original dexterity, right-handed.

"It's been bashed a bit, refinished and had some hardware changes, but I really don't mind – I don't have to worry if something has secretly been changed or if it's original. If it was, I wouldn't be able to afford to buy it. This relates to a lot of guitars in my collection. >

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Heale's 1964 Gibson ES-345

The ES-345 went leftie some time during its life

Fender Champ lap steel in Desert Sand

Mid-1960s Framus Strato Super and Fender Lead II

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FIND OUT MORE

Above, left to right, **1967 Gibson B-25 12-string (left) and steel-strung parlour guitar; the acoustic that Walter built himself (left) and 1965 Gibson Hummingbird**

"I've been playing this Framus Strato Super [previous page, bottom right] from the mid-60s a lot lately. I think it has a bit of a modern vibe about it, and ideal for some cranking blues, Black Keys style."

Most collectors have their favourite acoustic guitars as their main studio or live flat-top – or at least to tinker with late at night.

"I'd say this little Gibson B-25 12-string built in '67 was a cool contender for that," says Walter. "The neck looks far too big for the body, but there's plenty of room for full chord shapes and it's loud."

A big-bodied acoustic catches our eye, but there's no name on the headstock.

"That's right," says Walter, "The name is inside the soundhole, it's my name, because I built this one myself in the mid-90s.

"My Dad was an instrument maker who specialised in making early stringed instruments like the viol, also known as a 'viol da gamba', which is similar to a cello. I learnt a lot about the construction of those wonderful instruments from my dad. It all looked promising, so I went to the Newark School of Violin Making, but I lasted a year before I decided to go out on tour.

"I was influenced by the Lowden brand and large Gibson models for my homegrown model – using Russian pine for the soundboard and walnut for the body. Dare I say, it sounds really nice and turned out OK.

"Here's a cool Gibson Hummingbird from '65, which was owned by a country and western singer called Jeneene West. It's been played forever – lots of wear and repairs here. Notably, the two dowelled holes where the controls have been taken out of the soundboard.

"I've purchased all my guitars for sonic reasons. As long as they play OK and sound the part, I'm happy"

"But, like I mentioned earlier, I'm not at all worried, as I've purchased all my guitars for sonic reasons. As long as they play OK and sound the part then I'm happy, regardless of the condition of the cosmetics."

For more information about Walter Heale and Alphabetic, see the band's website: www.alphabeticband.com

Want to see your guitars, amps or effects featured in the pages of *Guitar & Bass*? Email the details and a few taster pics to **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com** to be considered for inclusion in a future issue.

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR COLLECTION

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Guitar gods like Slash, Michael Schenker and Mick Ronson have used the cocked wah sound to create monster riffs that have earned a permanent place in the rock lexicon. That required finding the sweet spot in their wah pedal's sweep. The Cock Fight lets you achieve that cool cocked wah sound without the wah pedal. Tune in the tone you want. Add the built-in distortion for more grind and growl, or switch to the Talking Wah mode for a stuck voice-box sound. If you plug in an expression pedal, you can sweep the Cock Fight for jaw dropping wah and talking pedal effects, with or without distortion!

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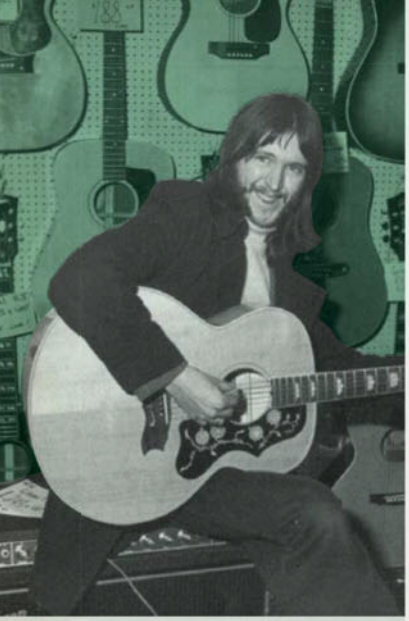

BAD TIDINGS I BRING

London's Denmark Street is famed for its legendary guitar shops, yet the little pocket of the West End it occupies is being radically transformed and **SID BISHOP** fears for its future...

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

Unless you've been living in a cave, you must have by now become aware that dark clouds are gathering ominously over dear old Denmark Street, and have been for some time. If you happen to be a regular shopper in the street, or even live outside London and just take a special trip there once a year or so, this might give you grave cause for concern.

That corner of the West End has become ripe for redevelopment in recent years. This is, in part, driven by the Crossrail project, a new railway line that will run from Reading all the way to Shenfield in Essex, and the east-west route is tearing its way right through central London – albeit underground. The landmark Centre Point building is being converted into expensive residential apartments and a shiny new interchange hub is being built at Tottenham Court Road station, together with a new plaza and entertainments centre covering the present site of Denmark Place and the northern end of Charing Cross Road. A rather scruffy old street full of guitar shops doesn't sit very well with this futuristic image of London. I will stick my neck out and make this prediction: the street as we presently know it will no longer exist within the next 15, possibly as few as 10, years. Its days appear to be numbered, despite the sterling efforts of several interested parties to stave off what seems to be inevitable, including petitions that have gained several thousand signatures. On a virtually weekly basis, I receive doom-laden snippets of news sent to me by friends and industry contacts who visit the area far more frequently than I am able to.

I have some understandable concerns regarding the impact that the aforementioned Crossrail development might have on the area, and on this street in particular. The scheme has undoubtedly resulted in considerable disruption and chaos in the short term, and continues to do so, but it will be interesting to see how the area's 'new look' impacts on the traders in the years that lie ahead, once the dust has (literally) settled.

Whether the existing buildings are demolished wholesale, or simply refurbished, won't actually make much practical difference to the present tenants in the long term. Money is the most powerful of motivators and property investors are well aware that a street full of gourmet hamburger bars, boutique hotels and gastro-pubs will generate considerably more revenue than a handful of guitar shops. Whatever else might happen, all property costs in this locale will inexorably rise, to the extent that the entire street as we know it will simply be squeezed out regardless. Those businesses may at some juncture have to move lock, stock and barrel somewhere else, assuming of course that the shop owners are collectively able to find an affordable alternative – ideally one that has a central and accessible location.

This will present something of a challenge given the current state of the London property market. Your grandchildren may still be taking a Saturday trip to the legendary Tin Pan Alley to buy their guitars, but by that time they will have to go to

Getty Images

Iconic Denmark Street shops such as this, filled with vintage treasures, could be a thing of the past as development plans and the Crossrail scheme continue to change the landscape of the West End of London (opposite page)

Camden Town or Whitechapel. This will leave whatever remained of Denmark Street to become home to tacky souvenir shops, snooty wine bars, pavement bistros and, in all likelihood, a Starbucks and a McDonalds.

Property developers operate their businesses to make money, and despite any impassioned assertions to the contrary, often have little or no interest in the history or culture of any place that has become a prime target for 'modernisation'.

I am well aware that one particular architect, to his credit, has undertaken to retain the identity of the area, even promising to rebuild affected buildings as close to their original state as is practical, though I find it difficult to understand how this might be realistically achieved. A fairly brief session of internet surfing reveals that I'm far from being the only person who has commented on this potential scenario, and some even cite this as just another example of the inevitable and relentless creep of corporate globalisation. A bit extreme? I'll let you be the judge of that.

I hope fervently that Tin Pan Alley survives in something approaching its present form

Nonetheless, I feel compelled to retain some degree of optimism, and despite everything I've written I hope fervently that Tin Pan Alley continues to survive in something approaching its present form. Some small-scale development has already begun to nibble away at the street – the 12 Bar Club is no more, the sax shop has gone, and the demolition of Denmark Place is undeniably having an impact on the trading conditions of other retailers on the north side of Denmark Street. However, until the preservation campaign I referred to earlier is successful, if indeed it is in any meaningful way, there still exists the ever-present threat of over-enthusiastic or unsympathetic redevelopment, resulting in the disappearance of some entire buildings we are familiar with. Those monstrous looming monoliths, appearing to have been made of vividly coloured giant building bricks, that are now dominating St Giles High Street, could portend a bleak future. There are those who argue that Crossrail will result in improved accessibility to this part of the West End, and although this will be a positive in some respects – increased footfall for example – they furthermore claim that this will cause property values to rocket, possibly by even as much as 40- or 50-fold; from the viewpoint of the current residents, therefore, not quite so positive.

I must emphasise that the situation is an ongoing one, and any proposals are quickly opposed by those who take a different view, resulting in lengthy delays; so most of those shops, and the people they employ, should be secure for a little longer. It's likely to be some time before anything really drastic occurs, but I'm afraid the writing is on the wall.

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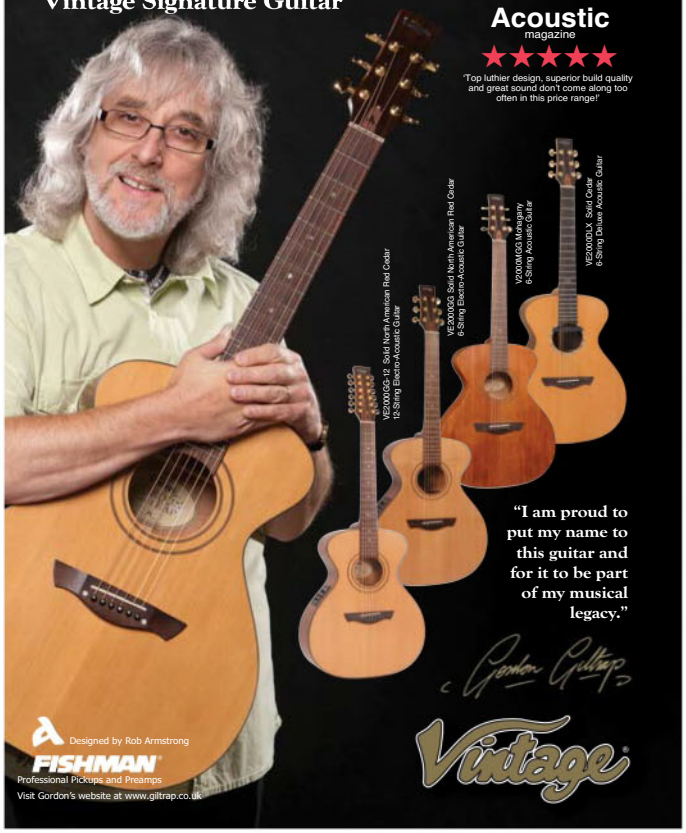

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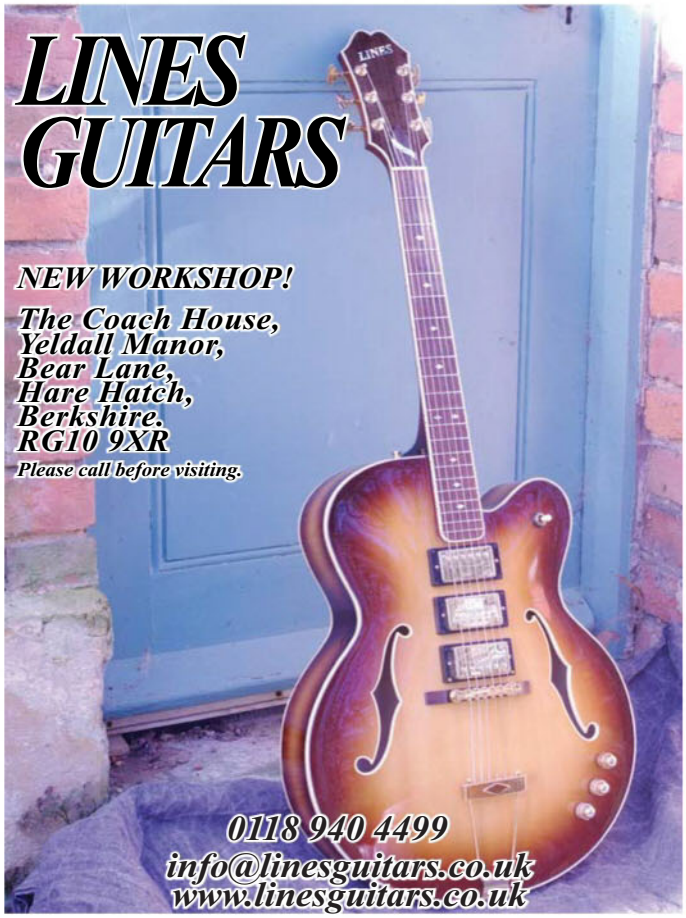

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All about... wah

Wah pedals helped shape the sound of psychedelia, defined the cop show soundtrack and formed the foundation of funk. **HUW PRICE** explains what's what with wah...

There are various accounts of the wah's invention, but nobody disputes that Thomas Organ engineer Brad Plunkett worked on the circuit in 1966. Back then, Thomas Organ distributed Vox products in the US, and Plunkett adapted a midrange boost circuit from a Dick Denney-designed Vox Super Beatle amplifier.

He replaced the three-way switch with a potentiometer to reduce manufacturing costs, and employed an Armstrong oscillator on the advice of colleague Les Kushner. Session guitarist and Vox endorsee Del Casher liked what he heard when turning the frequency select knob and figured it could sound good with electric guitars.

Casher claims he suggested using a Vox organ volume pedal instead of a control knob so guitarists could use the effect whilst playing. After a day of swapping components, Plunkett and Casher ended up with the basic design for the wah.

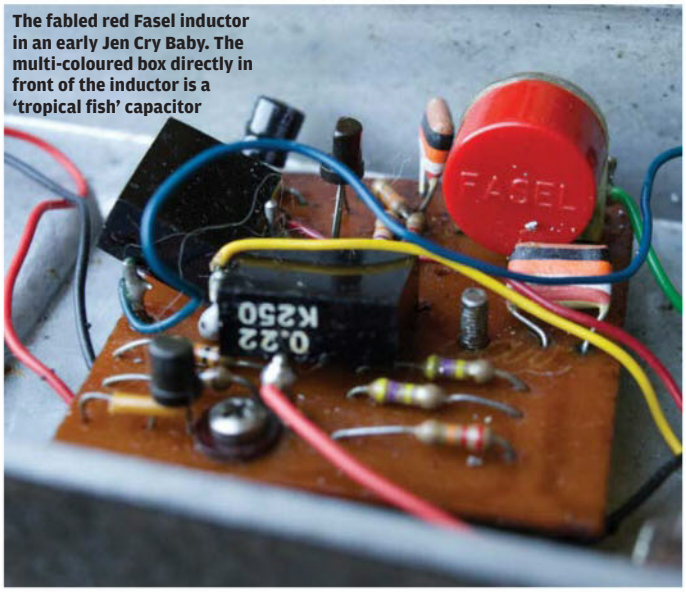
According to Casher, that's when Vox/Thomas Organ CEO Joe Benaron dropped in for a listen. Drawing on his business experience in the mattress industry, Benaron decided the wah pedal was unsuitable for guitar. However, he was convinced he could sell millions of wahs to electric trumpeters.

Trumpeter Clyde McCoy was subsequently offered $500 to endorse a wah pedal he had never used, and the earliest US-manufactured Vox wah carried McCoy's likeness on the baseplate. Later McCoy 'signature' wahs had just an inscription, and both are highly sought after – albeit not by trumpet players.

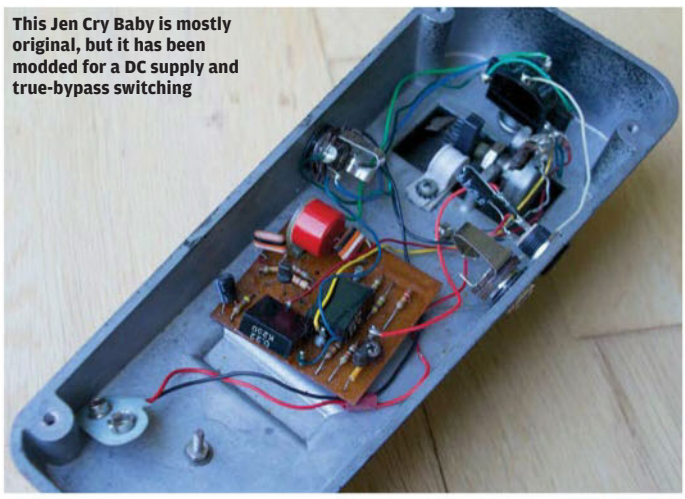
Thanks to Hendrix, Clapton *et al*, the wah quickly became the accessory no self-respecting psychedelic guitarist could be without. As for early proponents, give yourself a treat and check out Earl Hooker's *Wah Wah Blues* – Hendrix probably did.

The Vox V846 appeared in 1967, followed by the first Cry Baby in 1968, and soon the Thomas Organ and Vox wahs were being made by EME in Italy. Brad Plunkett and Les Kushner's names appear on a patent application filed on 24 February, 1967, but the patent wasn't granted until 22 September, 1970. By that time, copies were being made.

During 1969, Jen Elettronica took over production of the Cry Baby. These wahs are also collectable, and the various types of inductor used during manufacture are crucial to the allure of vintage wah pedals.



The fabled red Fasel inductor in an early Jen Cry Baby. The multi-coloured box directly in front of the inductor is a 'tropical fish' capacitor



This Jen Cry Baby is mostly original, but it has been modded for a DC supply and true-bypass switching

Thanks to Hendrix, Clapton et al, the wah became the accessory no psychedelic guitarist could be without

The circuit

The wah pedal is, first and foremost, a band-pass filter that rolls off the treble and the bass and creates a resonance peak at the low-pass filter frequency point. The result is a boost that's targeted at a very narrow frequency band. If you want to know what this 'stuck wah' sounds like, check out some of Mick Ronson's early recordings with David Bowie.

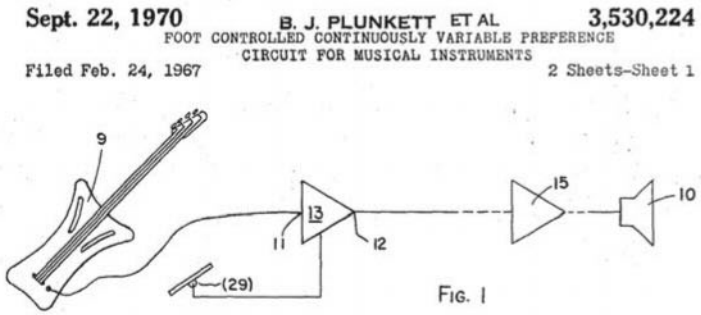
Moving the pedal sweeps the resonance peak up and down the frequency range and makes your guitar go 'wah'. It's not unlike a parametric equaliser boost with a narrow 'Q' setting, but most equalisers of that era switched between multiple inductors and capacitors to target various frequency points. The clever thing about the wah circuit is the way it moves the low-pass frequency point using a fixed inductor and a single capacitor.

A potentiometer, transistor and fixed capacitor combine to trick the inductor into 'thinking' it's connected to a variable capacitor. The pedal adjusts the amount of current flowing through the capacitor, which makes the value of the capacitor appear greater than it really is, so the position of the resonance peak is determined by the amount of current passing through the capacitor.

Inductor types

Various types of inductor have been used, and although none of the inductors were expensive or esoteric items, some have acquired legendary status.

The earliest inductor, and the one that was used in the Clyde


Sept. 22, 1970 B. J. PLUNKETT ET AL 3,530,224
FOOT CONTROLLED CONTINUOUSLY VARIABLE PREFERENCE CIRCUIT FOR MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
Filed Feb. 24, 1967 2 Sheets-Sheet 1
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(29)
FIG. 1

models and the earliest V846s, is called the 'halo'. A metal-cased halo inductor – aka the 'trash can' – was used in the earliest Italian-made wahs, but Jen wahs had red Fasel inductors. All three are highly regarded, just like the brown epoxy-covered 'stack of dimes' inductor, but the least popular of the vintage types is the cube-shaped TDK.

Copies of many of the vintage inductors are now being made, and upgrading wah inductors is a simple and popular DIY pedal tweak. You can get red and yellow Fasels from Dunlop, and halo types from Small Bear Electronics, Arteffect, Mojo Tone and others. Banzai Music sells halo and stack of dimes repros.

There are plenty of opinions on how each inductor sounds, and there are several other components that impact the tone of a wah pedal, too. Simply soldering in a replacement inductor is not a guarantee of tonal nirvana.

Key components

It helps if you can identify the various components and understand how they influence the wah response. After-market potentiometers can change the feel of the wah, and you can sweeten the characteristics of modern pedals by installing lower-gain transistors.

Resistors that have drifted in value can effect Q width, frequency response and signal level. Replacing out-of-spec resistors with ones that test well will restore the 'vintage' sound. Alternatively, you can use different values to 'tune' the wah to your taste.

Buffer issues

Vintage wah pedals were never true bypass, and the load they put on guitars sucks treble – even when they're off. Wahs made from the mid-90s onwards have input buffers to cure this, and those wanting vintage specs often remove the input buffer.

Wah plus fuzz is regarded as being a classic combination, but the impedance mismatch when Fuzz Face and Tone Bender-type fuzzes are used results in a reduced wah effect and a squawking oscillation that sweeps with the wah pedal.

None of the various solutions are perfect. Much of the magic of vintage fuzz pedals comes from touch dynamics and their ability to clean up from the guitar volume control. Placing a buffered pedal between the wah and the fuzz, or installing a buffer stage inside the wah, may solve the squawking, but some of the fuzz's best qualities will be lost.

Modern wahs

Wah customising dates back to the beginning, when Hendrix retained Roger Mayer as his personal tweaker. Although most wahs are still based on the old Clyde circuit, modern pedal builders understand how to alter the voicing to create specific wah tones and responses.

These days, it's not uncommon to find Q controls and frequency range switches on the side of the casing; so you can go for bassy or trebly wah tones and emphasise the 'vocal' quality by narrowing the Q. You can even switch between inductors.

Some pedals feature switchable output buffers and LED indicators, and true bypass is commonplace. Since potentiometers and switches wear out, some manufacturers have dispensed with them altogether. However, one thing has never changed – they all go WAH!

BUYER'S GUIDE

Big or small, sweet or aggressive, trebly or bassy, vintage or modern, buffered or bypassed – whatever you need from a wah, there's bound to be one out there that's perfect for you...

VOX V846-HW £153

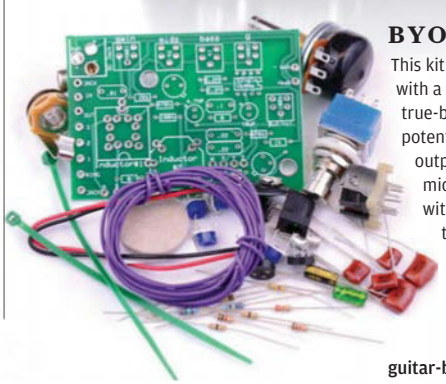
The company that started it all is still making wah pedals, and this handwired version of the V846 is top of the line. The circuit is constructed on turret board with carbon composite resistors and polyester film capacitors. There's a halo-style inductor, too, but the only concession to modernity is the true-bypass switch. This one is high on vintage mojo, but light on features – and it's battery only.

T-REX SHAFTER £168

Offering a much wider frequency sweep, quieter operation, greater durability and three distinct wah settings, T-Rex claims to have addressed "all the weaknesses of the classic wah point by point". Features include custom coils and inductors, boost and slope knobs, a hot spot switch for classic or 'heel to toe' sweep and potentiometer-free operation.

JIM DUNLOP CBM95 CRY BABY MINI £89

Traditional wahs take up a lot of space and they're hard to attach to pedalboards. The Mini may be half-sized, but it's loaded with a Fasel inductor and a three-way voicing switch for subtle, vintage and modern tones. It has true-bypass switching, too.



BYOC WAH KIT £67

This kit is basically a Clyde clone with a halo, BC108 transistors, true-bypass switching and a CTS potentiometer. There's an optional output buffer and the gain, bass, mid and Q resistors are replaced with trim pots so you can tune the tone. The board can be dropped into any Cry Baby-style enclosure to replace the original board, or you can buy

Chord Clinic

Seventh chords can evoke distinctly dreamy or unsettling emotions, as exemplified on George Harrison's *Something* or David Bowie's *Life On Mars*. Here, **ROD FOGG** unravels the real value of the seventh...

Seventh chords... in two flavours

Major and minor chords are built from a root, third and fifth, so the next logical note to add to a chord is the seventh. We've seen that thirds come in two flavours – major and minor. Sevenths are the same. The easiest way to understand the difference between a major seventh and a minor seventh is to compare the interval to an octave. If you take a look at the C major chord in figure 1 you will see an octave between the note C on the A string and the note C on the B string.

Try playing just those two notes on their own to hear the octave. To make the Cmaj7 chord you release your first finger and sound the open B string. So the major seventh is one semitone, one fret or (in the US) one half step short of an octave. This means that the formula for a major seventh chord is a major triad (C-E-G) plus a major seventh (C-B), and to describe the chord we call it a "C major seven".

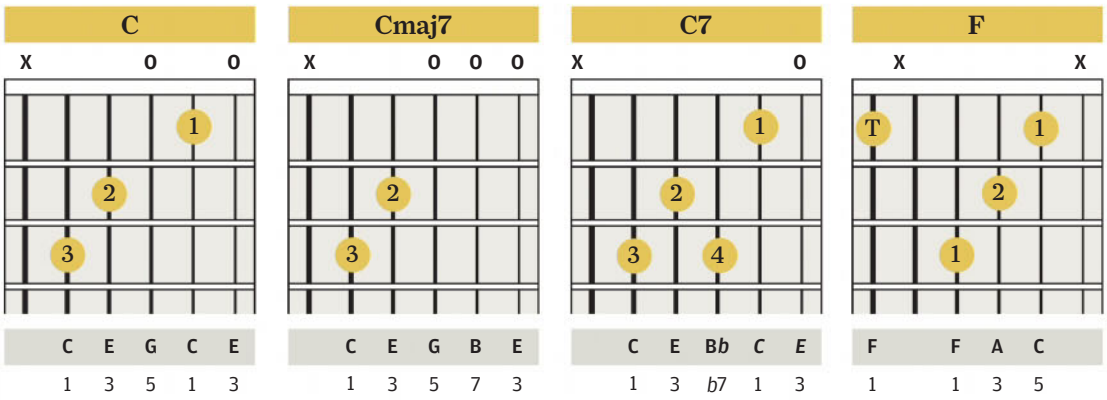
To make the C7 chord, put your first finger back down on the B string and add the B flat, which is the minor seventh, using your pinky on the G string, third fret. The minor seventh is two frets lower than an octave. So the formula for a "seven" chord is major triad (C-E-G) plus minor seventh (C-B♭); we refer to it as "C seven". Remember the numbers at the bottom of the chord diagram show you how the notes of the chord relate to the major scale built on the same root.

In this voicing Cmaj7 has the notes 1, 3, 5 and 7, and the third is doubled. C7 has just 1, 3 and ♭7 because in this voicing the flattened seventh is actually taking the place of the fifth. Both the third and the root are doubled.

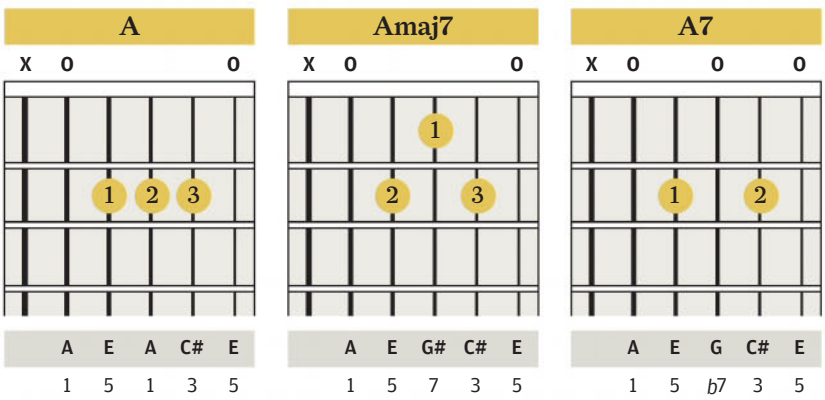
As you can see, Cmaj7 and C7 are not the same thing. The major seven has a dreamy quality and is harmonically stable. It's quite common for a jazzy tune to end on a major seventh chord. The seven chord, on the other hand, has an unstable quality and seems to want to push on to another chord – in the case of C7 the next chord would often be F major. The F shape we have here uses the "thumb over" approach, together with some strategic muting of open strings.

Some chord sequences use major seven and seven chords in succession. The four chords in figure 1, played one chord per bar, will give you the opening of George Harrison's *Something*, which has an amazing

The opening chord sequence for 'Something' by George Harrison (Fig 1)



Sevenths and major sevenths (Fig 2)



chord sequence for all of its nine-bar verses. One more bit of theory: C7 is a type of chord known as a "dominant seventh". To explain, a chord with a major triad and a minor seventh occurs naturally when a chord is built on the fifth step of a major scale, and the name of the fifth step of the major scale is the "dominant". Too much theory? Just get used to the idea that if someone asks you to play a dominant seventh chord you need to play the one that has a major triad with a minor seventh.

Figure 2 demonstrates the same chord sequence as above, but this time starting on A major – the fourth chord would be D major. Simply alternating between the major chord and the major seventh chord can sound good, too, as Noel Gallagher discovered when writing the bridge to *She's Electric* ('And I want you to know...'). The Red Hot Chili Peppers start the chorus of *Universally Speaking* ('C'mon baby 'cos there's no name for...') in the same way.

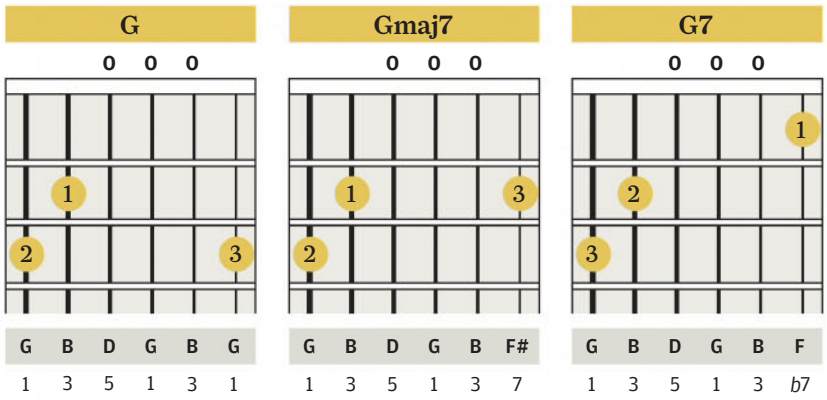
Playing the sequence in A major and G major enables you to see the logical progression from major chord to major seventh to dominant seventh on the guitar fingerboard. In

3, if you are playing *Something* in the key of G, the chord after G7 would be C. However, we'd be tempted to go for E, mainly because we were thinking more of *Life On Mars* – the David Bowie song. I'm always tickled by the fact that S Club Seven's song *Reach* has exactly the same opening chord sequence. Put a capo on the first fret in order to play it in the original key.

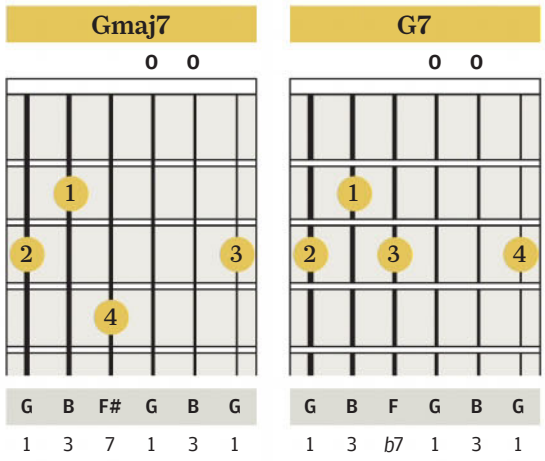
Staying with G major for a moment, we could also try a few low voicings for the added sevenths. Check out figure 4; both these voicings work well and I particularly prefer the chunky low-voiced G7 chord to the somewhat folksy example from figure 3. Try omitting the doubled third on the A string on these shapes – mute it with the underside of the finger that's on the sixth string. Re-finger the chord in any way that suits you if you're going to try this.

Figure 5 shows the major seventh and dominant seventh chords in the key of E. The D sharp on the D string in the Emaj7 chord can sound a bit murky, so figure 6 re-voices the same two chords with the sevenths >

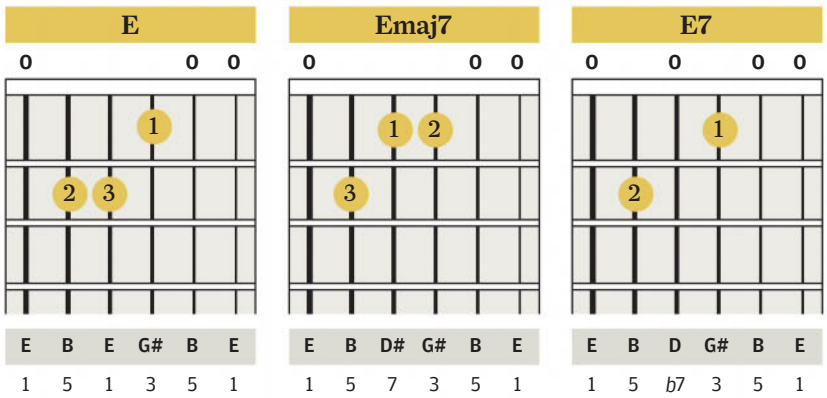
A more folksy voicing (Fig 3)



Low voicings for the added sevenths (Fig4)



Major seventh and dominant seventh chords in the key of E (Fig 5)



an octave higher. The first one is a bit of a stretch, but it's worth it to hear the major seventh (D sharp) clashing spectacularly with the open E string. It is something of a relief when the chord moves on to E7. By the way, for *Something* in this key, the next chord would be A major.

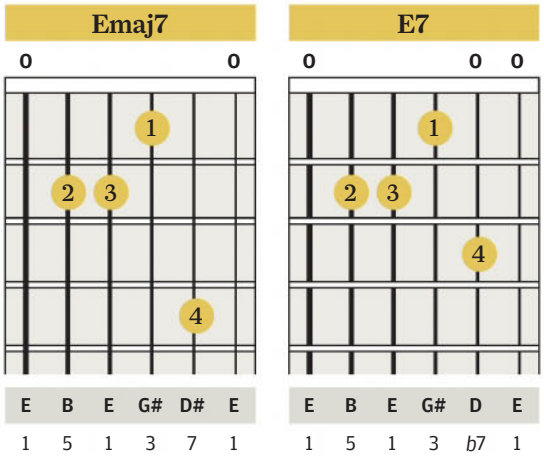
This is probably a good place to mention that sometimes the maj sign is replaced by a small triangle, or Delta symbol – Δ, so Dmaj7 can appear as DΔ7, but this mainly happens in jazz chord charts. Figure 7 takes you to the key of D, and you can clearly see the root on the B string progressing down the guitar one fret to become the major seventh, and then one fret more to become the minor seventh in the D7 chord. Play G major for the next chord.

Achingly sweet sevenths

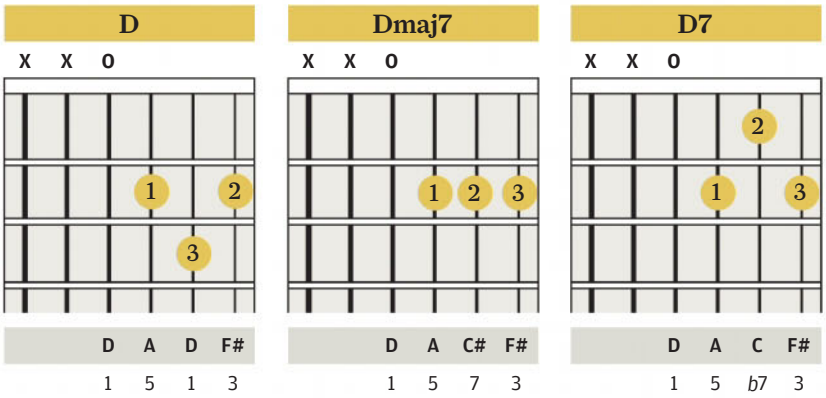
Major seventh chords occur naturally on first and fourth steps of a major scale. In C major, that would give you Cmaj7 and Fmaj7 (see figure 8). Capo the first fret and play a bar of each and you will have the intro to 60s star Herb Alpert's *This Guy's In Love With You*. Back then, composers such as Burt Bacharach were not afraid to use major seventh chords or, come to that, minor seventh chords.

But we are going to save them for next month, together with a more in-depth look at the uses of dominant seventh chords. Just to finish off, figure 9 introduces a set of chords built on A, with some sweet, chiming sevenths high up on the top string. Could they inspire you to write a love song?

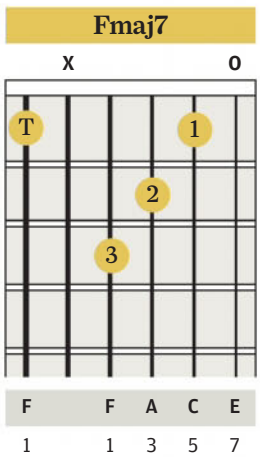
Revoicing the same two chords (Fig 6)



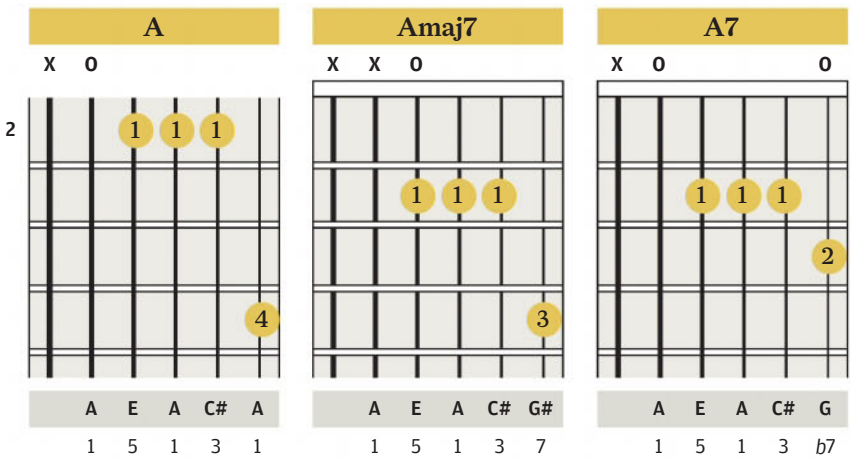
Down in D (Fig 7)



Major seventh (Fig 8)



Inspiring sequence (Fig 9)



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ANTHEM PUBLISHING FROM THE MAKERS OF *GUITAR & BASS* MAGAZINE

Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: DIY projects, low-volume amps, Stuart Adamson remembered and a letter from Australia...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Starting young

Hey, my name is Jamie Engelmann. I am 12 years old and live in Australia and play an Epiphone Les Paul. I have been a huge fan of *Guitar & Bass* since I started playing guitar four years ago. I buy your magazine every month, it always has great interviews and informative reviews and I love the tech articles. I was wondering if I could get some company stickers so that I could paste them on my room wall, guitar case and a few on my laptop. Thanks again, keep up the good work, and I will always be a big fan of you guys!!

Jamie Engelmann, via email

***G&B** Hi Jamie, glad to hear you're a fan of the mag and you've made such a good start to your journey in guitar playing. I'm afraid we don't have any G&B stickers, but we hope you enjoy your prize of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp.*

Guitar & Bass LETTER OF THE MONTH

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics. Visit **www.orangeamps.com** for the full spec.

ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Do it yourself

As a reader for some time now, I get a little bored of the constant rhetoric regarding Strats, Teles and Les Pauls. There are, after all, many other quality makes of guitar in the world, many of them as good as, or even better than, the models I write about.

Leo Fender and Les Paul, indeed, designed great guitars. However, why is it that the first thing players seem to do is have the whole guitar stripped down and change whatever they can to, so called, improve the instrument? The true fact is that while the basic guitar is good, there is a lot left to be desired with the designs. Even great players like Clapton, Marvin and Knopfler made changes where they found weaknesses. I, personally, have never felt comfortable with Fenders – I like Burns guitars and have, from new, a Marvin guitar from 1966. The pickups, still Res-O-Matics, are replacements from a Legend; the windings of the originals corroded and failed (nobody supplied replacement parts when they failed, and I had to wait until a set came up for sale online).

When I look at Gibson guitars, it worries me the way people still drill holes and stick on a Bigsby trem unit and other devices – it ruins the whole instrument. I have had an old Columbus guitar for many years now, and one day decided to 'improve' the thing, so I took out the pickups and the wiring harness. I fitted a pair of Wilkinson coil-tap humbuckers, wired up a new harness with push-push pots and new capacitors. Looking at the price of trem units available, there was no way I would spend big money on a Stetsbar or a Bigsby, but then I came across a Duesenberg Les Trem II unit for just over £60 which, like the Stetsbar, requires no drilling or alteration to the guitar.

I ordered said unit and, as the information said, I was able to fit the unit in place of the original stop-tail with no problems. After a restring and fresh setup, I now have an instrument that not only plays well but sounds, to me, great. A great guitar need not cost a fortune.

Tim Wardlaw, via email

***G&B** You're absolutely right, Tim, a great guitar certainly doesn't have to cost a fortune. Huw Price's Workshop feature in G&B regularly underlines that point. Look out for it next month, when he'll be turning another entry-level guitar into a fine-playing instrument to be proud of.*

How low can you go?

I hope you don't mind me emailing you, but I read Richard Purvis' excellent review of the Hughes & Kettner TriAmp Mark 3 and would like to ask him a question.

I'd like to ask him what the amp sounds like at low, bedroom volumes. Very low sometimes, in fact, depending on whether Corrie's blasting out downstairs at the time!

It's not a totally daft question; I have a fine collection of boutique amps – including a Dual Rectifier, Mark V, Tone King, Two Rock and several others – and with proper adjustment and the occasional use of a suitable distortion pedal I end up with outstandingly subtle and complex sounds at minuscule sound levels. Clean tones on the Mark V and Recto at tiny volumes, for example, can be to die for, depending on the choice of guitar of course.

My thanks to you and your team for never failing to produce a highly enjoyable and entertaining read!

Philip Hall, via email

***G&B** Richard says: Hi Philip, thanks for the feedback. The TriAmp has long since left the building, so you're asking a lot of my addled memory here. There probably wasn't anyone watching TV in the next room when I described it as 'surprisingly punchy at low levels', but as I recall, with judicious use of the presence and resonance controls it was able to keep its tone very well, even at the sort of volume you could talk over. Not that you'd spend the best part of three grand on an amp and then talk over it, I hope...*

Best of British

Thank you for selecting my letter for your Letter Of The Month in Fretbuzz, October 2015 issue. I note your request for pictures of other early British electrics in response to another letter in the same issue, so I've attached a picture of some of my Burns guitars [see below].

Harry Ellis, via email

***G&B** Thanks Harry, great to see some of these early British-made guitars still being played and treasured by our readers. Do any other readers have British collections they'd like to share?*

Skids row

Hi, reading the Soundtrack Of My Life Hotei feature [*G&B*, October], it was such a nice surprise to see he rated a nod to Stuart Adamson of the Skids and their 1980 album *The Asbolute Game* as one of his influences.

I couldn't agree more. It was the Skids, and particularly Stuart Adamson's unique and melodic style of playing, that inspired me to become a guitarist after seeing them live on the Absolute Game tour in

Harry Ellis' quartet of Burns guitars

Matt Fisher's response to our 'Build a guitar like Brian May' article

1980. Stuart Adamson's solo on *Out of Town* is one that all guitarists should listen to. It is melodic and well phrased, not too long, not too short – and above all very well played.

Since Stuart Adamson's tragic passing, I think it is often forgotten what a unique, influential guitarist he was with such a huge talent for writing great melodic riffs and songs. In fact, his playing was such an influence on me in 1980 when I started out, I thought to myself if I could play even half as good as this bloke I might possibly be able to call myself a guitarist.

Well, the upshot is that I'm not half the guitar player Stuart Adamson was, but it's thanks to him that I do play, and that I have enjoyed it as much as I have for all these years! Influence is everything!

Great magazine as always, and a way more interesting read than your main competitor!

Brian Robinson, via email

Build it like Brian

It's taken a while but, inspired by the 'Build a guitar like Brian May' article in the January issue, I decided to take up the challenge during the summer. Attached are a few pictures of the result. I decided not to go down the Red Special route, but it's fair to say there's a strong influence from another legend of the British guitar world.

It cost a bit more than the £200 limit you set, but I wasn't going to put a set of £10 pickups in there (no disregard for Wilkinson – just slightly dubious you actually managed to get a set of three from eBay for only a tenner... total bargain!). How you managed to cram such a huge amount of info into such a short article is astonishing (especially after you split the 60s pickguard project over two issues...). I kept going back and reading the relevant bits to keep me on track... and reasonably sane.

I thought once it was over I'd never pick up a saw and sandpaper again, but the bug's bit and I've already started on the next one... Keep up the good work, etc!

Regards,

Matt Fisher, via email

G&B *Thank you for sharing your amazing build project with us Matt – it's an absolute beaut! Please do keep us posted on the next one. In the meantime, have any other G&B readers taken up the challenge of building a guitar for £200?*

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us by snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Gear Of The Year 2015

Our expert panel picks the best of the year's new guitars, amps, effects, acoustics and basses in our essential buyer's guide

THE HISTORY OF THE FENDER TWIN

We profile the life of this iconic amplifier

INTERVIEWS

Brad Whitford • Gary Clark Jr • Jon Gomm

REVIEWS

Vigier • Feline • Vox • Hartke • Martin Gibson • Red Witch • Tone King and more!

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•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Billy Gibbons and The BFG's
PERFECTAMUNDO

Afro-Cuban influences, a sheen of modern hip-hop, a dash of blues and a nod to Latin jazz make this first solo record from ZZ Top main man Billy Gibbons a highly eclectic set, and it might not be quite the album that longstanding fans were expecting. As a young man, Gibbons took tutelage from 'Mambo King' Tito Puente, and it's the rediscovery of this rhythmic flavour, which regularly occupies the foreground throughout the album, that sets the somewhat surprising tone here. In addition to providing guitar and throaty singing, Gibbons plays bass, organ and timbales on this album. While the addition of some auto-tuned vocals and bursts of MC'ing might be a sizable step too far for many of ZZ Top's hardcore fans, there's still enough of Gibbons' trademark doublestop riffery and bluesy, pinched-harmonic lead playing present to keep them satisfied. **CM**

7/10

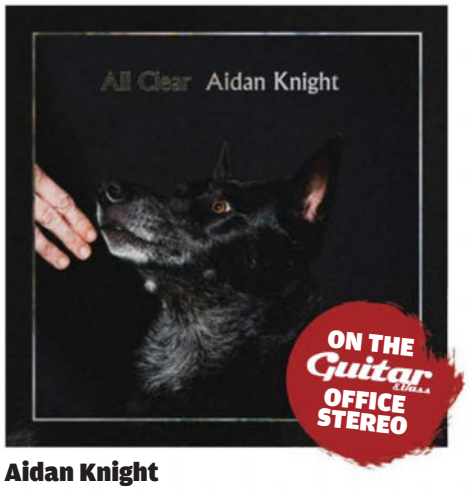
TRY IF YOU LIKE *ZZ Top, Santana*

John McLaughlin & The 4th Dimension
BLACK LIGHT

Now in his mid-70s, the uncannily youthful-looking John McLaughlin shows little sign of slowing down, a fact amply demonstrated on *Black Light*, an album recorded with his band The 4th Dimension, which sees the jazz-fusion pioneer spanning octaves and bizarre meters with the precision and intensity of a man half his age. Via his work with Shakti and The Mahavishnu Orchestra in the mid-1970s, McLaughlin became the first western musician to master the complexities of Indian classical music, and his genre-spanning dexterity is on display here. Tracks such as *Here Come The Jiis* and *Panditji* find the band in unbridled form. But it's when McLaughlin swaps his electric for a nylon-string acoustic on *El Hombre Que Sabía* – a tribute to late friend and collaborator Paco de Lucia – that this album blossoms into a work of emotion and power. **NC**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jeff Beck, Miles Davis*



Aidan Knight
EACH OTHER

Canada's Aidan Knight is backed by a collective of jazz and experimental musicians on this affecting and poignant album. Producer Marcus Parquin has worked with The National, Local Natives and Stars, and *Each Other* is, in places, evocative of all of those bands. Inventive time signatures, hypnotic guitar lines and dark brass contributions combine to forge a multi-textured bed for a lyrical set that's wistfully observational. The lilting *All Clear* features a delicious woody clean guitar tone that's reminiscent of another unheralded North American band, The Antlers. *What Light (Never Goes Dim)* sees pinched chords and a solemn piano melody give way to a glorious rising synth arpeggio and a vocal that'll burrow its way into hearts and minds, while *You Are Not Here* is a sorrowful waltz punctuated by a menacing, growling bass synth. The whole thing is painted with a deliciously gentle melancholy. **GW**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Antlers, Dan Mangan & Blacksmith*

Joanna Newsom
DIVERS

On this, her fourth album, the painfully talented harpist with a voice as delicate as a hummingbird's wing continues to conjure fantastical tales of astounding beauty. Harpsichord, clavichord and piano weave impishly between some subtle, refined guitar work. *Divers* is, though, Newsom's most disciplined and taut work yet, with such songs as *Leaving The City* bringing an incisive directness to the ornate beauty. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Kate Bush, Vashti Bunyan*

Deerhunter
FADING FRONTIER

A decade into the lo-fi Atlanta, Georgia band's career, their seventh studio long-player marks something of a departure from their garage rock roots. There's real depth to the production, which finds clean guitar tones, awash with reverb and tremolo, highlighted by fizzing synths and dreamy vocal harmonies. It's a varied collection that showcases their thoughtful songwriting and a verve for studio invention. **GW**

8/10

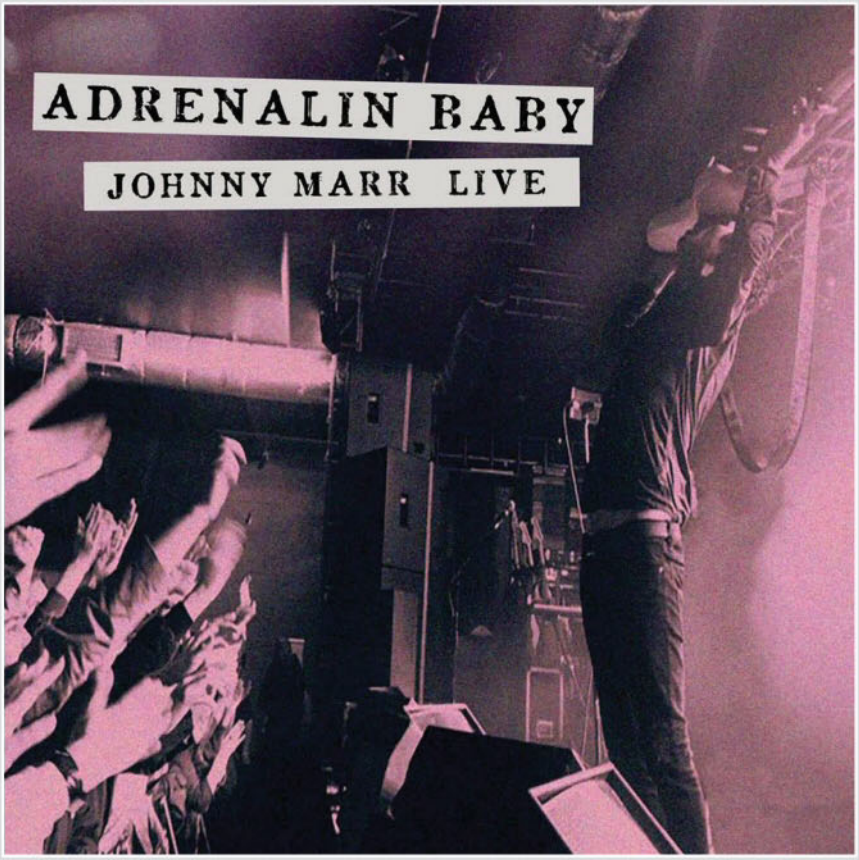
TRY IF YOU LIKE *Grandaddy, Animal Collective*

Gerard Cousins
THE FIRST BEAT IS THE LAST SOUND

Welsh guitarist Gerard Cousins fuses the traditional music of his homeland with jazz, Indian inflections and the influence of avant-garde US composers on his fourth album. Cousins is rooted in classical technique and has an engaging fluidity, exemplified by the title track; in contrast, he employs minimalism on compositions such as *Lisa Lan* and *Cantus Tintinnabulous (Homage to Arvo Part)*. **NC**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *John Williams, Philip Glass*



FEATURED ALBUM

Johnny Marr
ADRENALIN BABY

The career of one of the most unique players of his generation has seen something of a renaissance of late. High-profile stints bolstering indie bands Modest Mouse and The Cribs with his characteristic guitar textures led Marr to release his debut solo record, *The Messenger*, a fantastic indie-guitar rock album which, for the first time, foregrounded his songwriting chops. The album was soon followed by Marr's not-quite-as-good (but still rather great) sophomore set, *Playland*. This live album captures Marr and his road band during last year's tour for the *Playland* LP.

In addition to solo material, Marr dips into his personal history here, with a version of Electronic's *Getting Away With It* and an array of crowd-satiating Smiths songs, which he vocally handles with surprising aplomb, giving *The Headmaster Ritual* his best Morrissey. What's really on show here, though, is Marr's remarkable guitar work, which amazes, perplexes and simultaneously moves. There's a certain air of 'the returning hero' about his solo resurgence, and *Adrenalin Baby* serves as a great document of a bona-fide legend riding the crest of a new career peak – as many T-shirts in the audience stated, it's "Johnny F**kin' Marr", after all! **AP**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Smiths, Modest Mouse*

Skindred
VOLUME

The Welsh band's latest lives up to its name. Packed to the rafters with chunky riffs and huge vocals, it boasts a formidable metal sound with reggae roots. Tracks such as *Under Attack* and *No Justice* are packed with hard-rocking energy, and Benji Webbe produces a killer vocal performance on the likes of *Saying It Now*. The album also sees a revival for the 'talk box' effect – nice! This needs to be played loud! **TT**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Korn, Metallica*

EL VY
RETURN TO THE MOON

EL VY comprise The National vocalist Matt Berninger and guitarist Brent Knopf of Menomena. *Return To The Moon* is a compelling mix of their respective styles, and finds enough common ground to work. Knopf's more experimental and angular work is balanced by Berninger's doleful croon, and tracks such as *No Time To Crank The Sun* will sate the appetite of fans of the latter who are awaiting The National's next album. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The National, Pavement*

Reissue spotlight

Marc Bolan & T Rex
UNCHAINED: HOME RECORDINGS & STUDIO OUTTAKES 1972-1977

This glossy boxset compiles eight long-deleted CD compilations of Bolan's studio demos, alternate takes and other curios for the rabid Bolan-ite. The sound quality varies greatly, as does the calibre of some of the material. However, that's pretty much the point of this lovingly assembled box – to lay bare the unpolished and raw Bolan.

It also includes insightful annotation from acclaimed Bolan biographer Mark Paytress.

What's fascinating about this compilation is the insight it provides into the creative process of the man, and the prodigious oeuvre that the young superstar amassed. Bolan's work is often unfairly written off as chart-oriented and somehow lesser when compared to the 'giants' of 70s British rock. Yet his mainstream appeal for youngsters during the early 70s does nothing to devalue his undeniable ability as a songwriter and guitarist. Contrarily, his (albeit short-lived) position at the head of the pop scene in the early 70s did much to inspire the next generation of music-makers, from punks to new romantics.

Bolan's influence was seismic by the period covered on the second disc of this box: *1972: Part 2*. T Rex had evolved from little-known, arcane folkies into chart-bothering, electro-boogie gods, thanks to 1971's *Electric Warrior* album. This is perhaps the most fascinating portion of Bolan's career, and this disc underlines the work that went into composing some of the era's most iconic pop/rock hits.

His occasional chart rival, David Bowie, shed his glam persona and moved into new genres through the second half of the 70s, but Bolan could never fully leave behind the aesthetic, which resulted in a waning chart career. T Rex's final salvo of LPs didn't live up to the high standards of the earlier classics, and the final set of outtakes and demos in this box are perhaps only for dedicated Bolanistas.

Should you already be a dyed-in-the-wool fan, you'll find many things to love, but if you're just starting to dip your toe into T Rex's oeuvre, then it's probably not for you. **AP**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Marc Bolan, T Rex*

For a chance to win *Marc Bolan & T Rex's Unchained: Home Recordings & Studio Outtakes* boxset, go to www.guitar-bass.net/comps/bolan

WILLIE ADLER

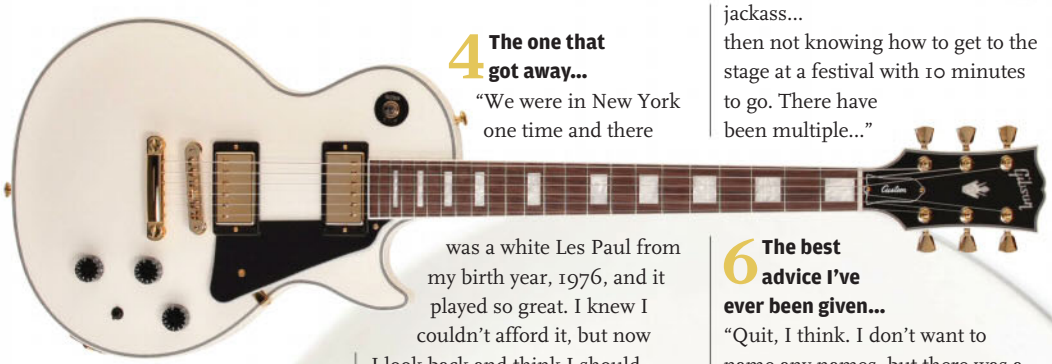
"My Spinal Tap moment..."

The Lamb Of God guitarist talks chicken picking, hip-hop and culinary ambitions...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"At the moment, it's probably my ESP Warbird. I absolutely love it. It's the guitar I always wanted, but I didn't kind of know I wanted it until it was built! We spent a lot of time on it and I'm extremely happy with it."

2 In another life, I would be...
"If I weren't a musician, I would be in the food industry. Absolutely. I love anything culinary; I love cooking. I find it a very therapeutic, creative outlet. To have a restaurant, ultimately, would be rad, but I'd love to travel and learn under great chefs, and be in the trenches and be put to work and whipped into shape!"

around. I remember first hearing *Toys In The Attic* by Aerosmith, and picking up Chris's guitar after playing piano for so long, and it just felt like part of me."



3 The band that started it all...
"I'd grown up playing piano. My mom had me in piano lessons from when I was six until about 10. My brother [Lamb Of God drummer] Chris had a guitar lying

4 The one that got away...
"We were in New York one time and there was a white Les Paul from my birth year, 1976, and it played so great. I knew I couldn't afford it, but now I look back and think I should have just done it. It was beautiful. Thanks for reminding me!"

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"There have been some times when I've forgotten to turn off my tuning pedal and there's been nothing, and I've looked like a jackass... then not knowing how to get to the stage at a festival with 10 minutes to go. There have been multiple..."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Quit, I think. I don't want to name any names, but there was a particular guy that just said, 'You guys should give it up, it's not going to happen'. All that did was fuel my fire to move forward."

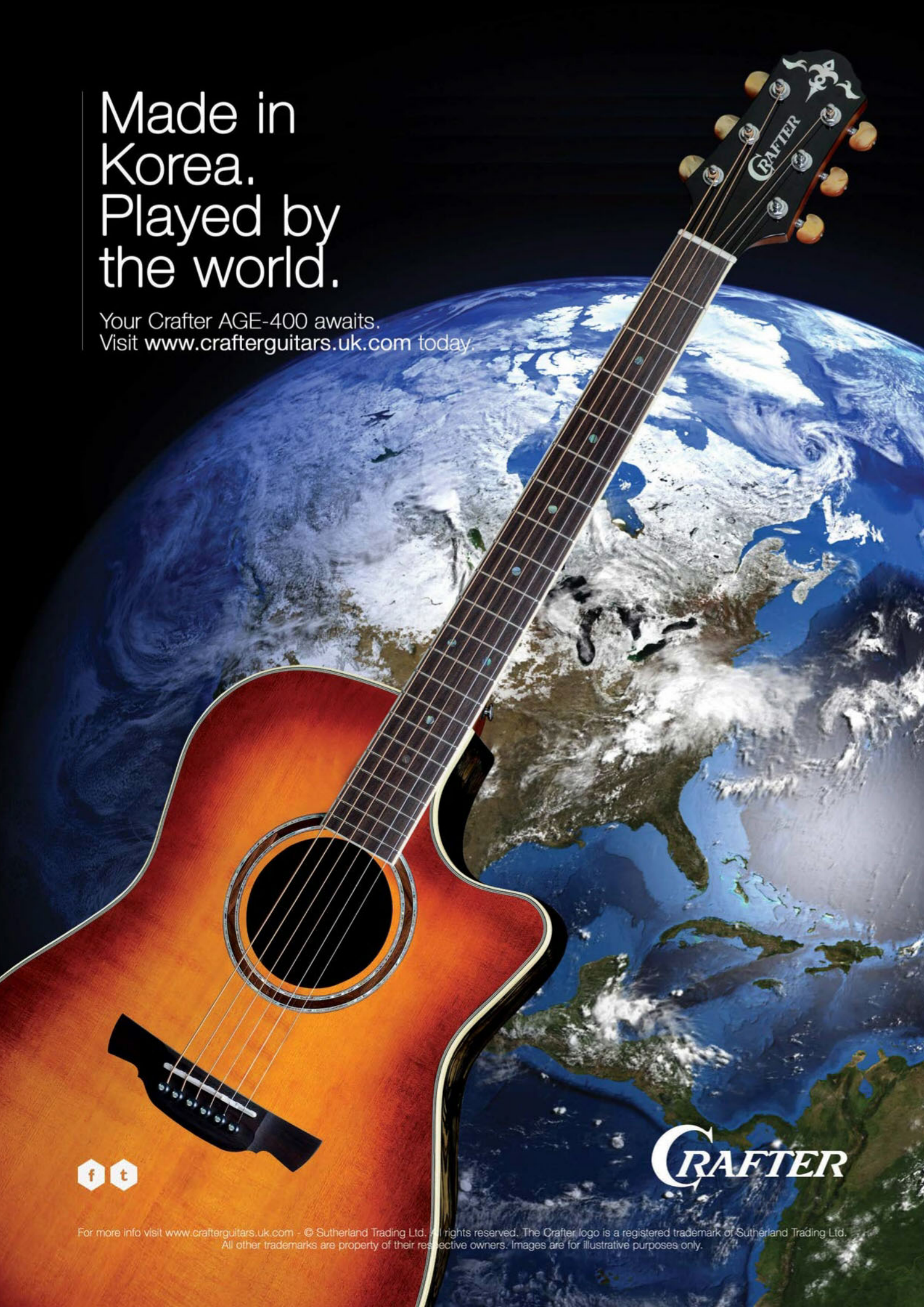
7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"There's a lot of different riffs of ours that are my go-to, kind of warm-up thing. But there's a lot of times when I'll just sit at home and jam, and just riff out. I'm always recording everything that I play just in case. I have so many voice recordings on my phone..."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Anything that our tour manager needs, because without him we're fucked."

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I wouldn't even call it guilty – I listen to a lot of hip-hop. I have a lot of hip-hop on my iPod."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"I'd love to learn how to chicken pick. I'm always just fascinated by it; I think it's really cool and I'd love to learn it."

Lamb Of God's UK and European tour gets under way at the 3Arena in Dublin on 9 November and concludes on 18 November. For details, visit www.lamb-of-god.com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CS Series

The Ultimate 1950's Style Hand Crafted Player's Les Paul

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